

**Gender Dis-Ease: Representations of Masculine Hysteria in Narratives of  
Sexual Trauma**

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## ABSTRACT

My dissertation addresses the conflicts of masculine subjectivity evident in narratives of sexual trauma, including Patrick Süskind's novel *Perfume*, Neil Gaiman's graphic story "Calliope," Ian McEwan's short story "Homemade," Chang-rae Lee's novel *A Gesture Life*, J.M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, Timothy Findley's novel *The Wars*, and Kimberly Peirce's film *Boys Don't Cry*. I argue that in these narratives patriarchal culture is represented as toxic, producing a pathological form of masculinity that is founded on violent repudiation of female and feminized Others. For men and boys, the disavowal of masculine fears and anxieties, as well as the collective shame and silencing of feelings of inadequacy and vulnerability, all contribute to social conditions that produce a hostile, destructive, and violent masculinity. Hysteria or what I call "gender dis-ease" offers an apt model to illustrate the effect that this configuration of masculinity has on both the mind and body of the afflicted subjects.

The historical context of war trauma reveals the construction of hysteria as a state of masculinity that is feared and abject in its connotations of vulnerability, effeminacy and homosexuality. In this sense, those men who occupy a hysterical position are seen as a threat to the constitution of patriarchal masculinity. Indeed, the repudiation of male hysteria can be seen as the foundation of hegemonic masculine subjectivity. When situated within the theories of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Jonathan Dollimore, and Michael S. Kimmel, the male hysteric can be seen as a subject that destabilizes masculinity in such a way that it reveals its careful construction as a fixed and static category as well as its function to maintain social stability through heterosexism, homophobia, and misogyny. Patriarchal culture has produced traumatic conditions, such that those who are vulnerable or marked as "Other" than the norm are targeted with abuse and violence. The violence perpetuated and expressed in patriarchal culture targets all those who appear vulnerable and weak. This includes individuals who do not conform or fit into the narrow constraints of the binary structures of gender and sexuality.

The narratives that I have included in my discussion exemplify how contemporary authors and filmmakers are representing masculinity in ways that defy or challenge

hegemonic constructions of gender. In Section One of my discussion, I look at contemporary Gothic narratives that focus on male violators, narratives by Süskind, Gaiman and McEwan. Each of these authors explores the psychodynamics of male violators to illustrate how it is often the normative qualities of hegemonic masculinity, such as ambition and entitlement, that become malevolent forces, leading “normal” men to do monstrous acts of sadistic violence. In Section Two, I continue my examination of male violators, yet shift my focus to the journey of redemption undertaken by men who have committed sexual violence. The male protagonists in narratives by Lee and Coetzee have been complicit in supporting patriarchal power structures, yet are represented as suffering post-traumatic shame and regret for their actions. In Section Three, I look at representations of male or male-identified victims of sexual violence in Findley’s *The Wars* and Peirce’s film *Boys Don’t Cry*. Both Findley and Peirce represent the anguish and struggle of being different within a patriarchal system that disavows and victimizes dissident subjectivities. Ultimately, by reading gender dis-ease or hysteria within these narratives, I am attempting to show how contemporary literature and film challenge patriarchal constraints and power inequalities, while also promoting alternative masculinities.

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## **Introduction**

### **Gender Dis-Ease: Representations of Masculine Hysteria in Narratives of Sexual Trauma**

But could hysteria also be the son's disease, or perhaps the disease of the powerless and silenced?

(Elaine Showalter, "Hysteria, Feminism, Gender" 288)

Depictions of hysteria often portray the sufferer as a young, attractive female overtaken by a fit of emotional and physical distress as a result of her vulnerable, volatile sensibility. André Brouillet's lithograph of the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot lecturing at the Salpêtrière clinic is a case in point (Figure 1). In the image, Charcot's apprentice is shown supporting the limp body of a female hysteria patient, demonstrating to medical students the symptoms of the woman's disorder. The woman is shown in a highly sensual manner, her hair draped down, her shoulders exposed, her back arched, her body clothed in a loose-fitting blouse suited more for the bedroom than a lecture hall. With the exception of the female nursing attendant, the patient is surrounded by men whose interest in her appears to be motivated as much by their sexual curiosity as by their quest for knowledge. The men support the woman's fragile, weakened body, and gaze with full attention at her uninhibited bodily contortions. They observe her, classify her, and study her as an object of medical inquiry; however, there is also a sense of astonishment and mystery. In her strange body language, they see her as offering a glimpse into the primal aspects of the nature of women. Each symptom tells the tale of a deep-rooted fear, a hidden desire, a forbidden aggression, a guilty conscience, or an unspeakable sadness. At the center of the scene is Charcot: older, tightly buttoned, and composed. He is in command of the situation, captivating his audience of medical men with his lecture while his female patient passively displays her symptomatic behaviour. Indeed, the female patient has been rendered fully malleable under the suggestion of hypnosis, a technique Charcot regularly employed on his hysterical patients to produce symptoms under a controlled situation. As Martha Noel Evans describes in her genealogy

of hysteria, in this hypnotic trance, the female patient would fall under the “will and domination” of her advisors (44). The hysteric would be completely susceptible to the command of the men in charge. This disparity of power between doctor and patient inevitably led to cases of sexual exploitation of hysteria patients (44). In this way, Brouillet’s painting does more than recall a classic scene of hysteria; it demonstrates a configuration of sex and gender that affirms women’s sexual objectification through male-dominated representations.



Figure 1: André Brouillet “Une leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière” (1887).

This popular representation of hysteria portrays sex and gender in a way that illuminates latent structures of power. The male figures featured in this representation are portrayed in stark contrast to the vulnerable and disturbed female hysteric. The men impose a sexual-scientific gaze upon the female patient, holding a position of power in relation to her as she loses control, succumbing to hysteria. Yet the collected case studies of Charcot, Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud, Sándor Ferenczi and even, further back, the medical treatises of Plato show that men were not immune from hysterical unrest. Despite its derivation from the Greek word *ὑστέρα*, *ustera*, or uterus (*OED* “hysteric”), hysteria has not been exclusively a female disorder. The etiology of hysteria and its roots in sexual trauma seem to exclude male subjects; yet historically this was not the case. In his

overview of hysterical phenomena, Harold Merkskey cites Plato in *Timaeus* as one of the first Classical authors to construct hysteria as a sexual disorder that affects male subjects. Plato's description of hysteria as a female affliction of the "wandering womb" led to a myth of hysteria as biological in origin.<sup>1</sup> However, what Merkskey illustrates is that even in this early text, Plato describes how male sexuality is also susceptible to hysterical unrest. Of their tempestuous nature, Plato writes, "in men the organ of generation becom[es] rebellious and masterful like an animal disobedient to reason" (6). Indeed, viewing the male organ as rebellious with a "mind" of its own is a common representation. Plato's depiction of male sexuality points to the dualistic construction of both gender and disease, and highlights the inherent paradox of masculinity. Departing from the patriarchal ideal of masculine dominance and control, Plato imagines masculine sexuality as irrational and erratic, characteristics more often associated with femininity. Traditionally, there seems to be a contradictory construction of men's nature as simultaneously controlled and rational, yet also driven by an aggressive (potentially dangerous) and unruly sexual libido.

In a contemporary context, there has been a growing interest in the negative traits of masculinity, where excesses of male aggression have been pathologized in popular media as "testosterone poisoning" (Alda 3). While the causal link established between biology and behaviour is intriguing and should not be dismissed, it is the social environment, in particular the social system of patriarchal gender relations, which I argue is the central guiding force in masculine behaviour. Indeed, the violence, aggression, and sexual dominance associated with "testosterone poisoning" and hypermasculinity need to be acknowledged as part of the social construction of normative masculinity in a patriarchal system.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, it could be argued that under patriarchy, normative

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<sup>1</sup> Of female sexuality, Plato said of "the so called womb or matrix of women" that "the animal within them is desirous of procreating children and when remaining unfruitful long beyond its proper time, gets discontented and angry and wandering in every direction through the body, closes up the passages of the breath, and, by obstructing respiration, drives them to extremity, causing all varieties of disease" (66).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout my dissertation, the words "normal" and "natural" will be placed in quotation marks to indicate that these terms are constructed, variable, and contentious. In

masculinity is imbued with a “sickness,” not unlike the early cases of hysteria, that results from a toxic social environment of repression, fear, and inequalities of power.

Indeed, it is my argument that both sexes exhibit hysterical symptoms as a result of the rigid gender constraints and oppressive power disparities of patriarchy. I intend to explain how authors of contemporary literary and cinematic narratives depict the anxiety of male characters who cannot live up to the hegemonic norms of masculinity. These narratives show that hegemonic masculinity is constructed upon a fearful repudiation of male hysteria in its connotations of homosexuality, effeminacy, and alterity. Arguably, in its denial and repudiation of male hysteria, the patriarchal system masks and represses its own sickness: a sickness that I associate with hypermasculinity and sadistic violence. My central thesis is that the system of patriarchy is toxic, infecting certain men with a *gender dis-ease*, a condition that compels some men to become violent and oppressive, and to violate the social contract of human decency. The source of this gender dis-ease is fear and anxiety over not fitting into hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality, as well as the desperate desire to conform to a fantasy or ideal of patriarchal masculinity. As I will show in my discussion of sexual trauma narratives, denying the masculine subject an outlet for suppressed emotions and vulnerability can only result in sickness and disorder. Specifically, with these narratives I intend to illustrate that sickness is not separate from but intrinsic to hegemonic masculinity. This is not to say that all men in patriarchal societies are sick or disturbed, but it does suggest that the dominant ideology of masculinity denies men the opportunity to think, act, and feel outside of gendered norms; as such, it is a debilitating force, one detrimental to the overall wellbeing of both sexes.

Hysteria offers an apt model for the effects that this configuration of masculinity has on both mind and body of the afflicted subjects. In my analysis, I utilize the metaphor of hysteria as a gender dis-ease to characterize both masculine perpetrators and masculine victims of the patriarchal order, yet suggest that there are distinct differences in the experience and expression of hysteria. To mark these differences, this dissertation is

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my understanding, patriarchal ideologies define what is considered “normal” and “natural” in relation to the binary structures of gender and sexuality, in service of maintaining inequalities of power.

divided into three sections to delineate how hysteria differs between the masculine victim and violator positions. The first section deals with male perpetrators, who exemplify hysteria or gender dis-ease in their pathological violence, which I argue is rooted in latent fears and denial of sexual alterity. The second section discusses male perpetrators who attain an empathetic identification with female or feminized victims; they are shown to experience shame and guilt, expressing hysteria in their conflicted relationships to patriarchal ideologies. The final section discusses masculine victims of violence, where the characterization as hysteric is intended, not as a pathological diagnosis, but as a subjectivity that is marked by its alterity and marginalization from patriarchal norms; the masculine victim experiences persecution and violence as the abject object of patriarchal masculinity.

In Section One, I look at representations of male perpetrators in Patrick Süskind's novel *Perfume*, Neil Gaiman's graphic narrative "Calliope" from *The Sandman* comic series, and Ian McEwan's short story "Homemade" from his collection, *First Love, Last Rites*. Each of these authors explores the psychodynamics of male violators to illustrate how it is often the normative qualities of hegemonic masculinity, such as ambition, a sense of entitlement, and conformity, that become malevolent forces, leading "normal" men to do monstrous acts of sadistic violence. As contemporary Gothic texts, these selections provide explicit representations of violence that are meant to shock and disturb. While I read the explicit violence of these contemporary texts as a means to critique patriarchal masculinity, one may also argue that such representations of sadism re-enact this violence. In Section Two, I continue my examination of male perpetrators, yet shift my focus to the journey of redemption undertaken by some men who have committed sexual violence. The male protagonists in Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* are complicit in supporting patriarchal power structures, and are represented as suffering shame and regret over their actions. Specifically, the male protagonists are transformed by the experience of empathetic identification with the abject, female Other, when they too are forced into a position of traumatic victimization. In the depictions in Section Two, this intimate, personal experience of patriarchal trauma is connected with mass traumas, such as war and genocide. In Section Three, I look at depictions of male or male-identified victims of sexual violence in Timothy Findley's

novel *The Wars* and Kimberley Peirce's film *Boys Don't Cry*. Both Findley and Peirce represent the anguish and struggle of being different within a patriarchal system that disavows and victimizes diverse subjectivities. Neither Findley nor Peirce shy away from depicting the horrific violence enacted against LGBT, queer or questioning individuals within patriarchal culture. Rather, both Findley and Pierce illustrate how the defiant courage of characters who challenge the constraints of the patriarchal binary system by "queering" the boundaries of masculinity can lead to empathy in the reader.

These particular literary and cinematic representations of masculinity have been selected for this study because each highlights the violence and trauma inflicted through patriarchal norms. It should be noted that these representations interrogate and challenge dominant fictions or "grand narratives,"<sup>3</sup> such as patriarchy with its binary formations of gender. In doing so, these texts expose the violence and sadism that underlie dominant culture as well as imply the plurality of alternate masculinities that are so often marginalized and silenced. My inclusion of fictional representations, rather than autobiographical accounts of sexual violence, reflects my interest in the process of adapting trauma into fictional and cinematic narratives. As well, by restricting my study to prose narratives, rather than poetic forms, I emphasize the importance of narrative or "narrative memory" (van de Kolk & van der Hart 160) in the process of representing trauma. The formal design of these works, with the exception of Findley's *The Wars*, can be seen as providing more cohesion, integration, and meaning to the traumatic event within the scheme of storytelling. The narratives in this study provide knowledge and insight, drawing from the traumatic or cathartic effects of depictions of sexual violence. Shocking, horrifying, inspiring, and fascinating: taken together, these narratives represent some of the ways that contemporary authors and filmmakers are sharing stories of gender

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<sup>3</sup> In postmodernism, particularly in the critical works of Jean-François Lyotard, a grand narrative refers to a comprehensive and totalitarian narrative that makes claims to legitimacy (D. Morris 11). Grand narratives are challenged within postmodernism as imposing certain ideologies, and in turn, legitimizing the claim of certain groups to power. For Lyotard, and the postmodern age, there is distrust of the grand narrative. Indeed, as Lyotard argues in *The Postmodern Condition*, "the grand narrative has lost its credibility" (37). Along with this skepticism about grand narratives, postmodernism shifts its focus onto a plurality of individual narratives that deviate from the dominant culture.

violence, providing insight into traumatic experiences, and confronting the system of patriarchal power responsible for this violence

### **(His)Story of Male Hysteria: Abject, Feared and Forbidden**

Recent critical studies of hysteria, including works by Mark Micale, Paul Lerner, and Elaine Showalter, develop a direct connection between representations of masculine hysterical states and the act of interrogating dominant sex / gender systems (Micale 252). Micale's recent history of male hysteria in medical and cultural discourses exposes the highly constructed composition of the malady in relation to a traditional patriarchal system. Specifically, Micale illustrates how the diagnostic labeling of male patients as hysterics was systematically denied or evaded to uphold a patriarchal social order. In *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness*, Micale states that "sustaining patriarchy . . . required both idealizing the virtues and denying the vulnerabilities of hegemonic bourgeois masculinity" (280). This vigorous denial of masculine vulnerability had the effect of further victimizing those men, often working-class, suffering from symptoms of hysterical disorders. Physicians routinely characterized male hysterics as sexually aberrant, classifying a man suffering from hysteria as an "effeminate heterosexual, an overt homosexual, or a physical or emotional hermaphrodite" (Micale 200). Characterizations of male hysterics based on their perceived sexually transgressive natures not only illustrate prejudice in the medical field, but also offer a glimpse into the inherent instabilities of masculine gender identity itself. Micale's analysis of why male hysteria was constructed in such a way that the sufferers were both ostracized and consistently feminized reveals what he sees to be a defensive strategy to mitigate fears within the masculine psyche (281). Specifically, Micale suggests that it is the fear of uncovering femininity in the male mind that is defended against through the repression, exclusion, and denial of male hysteria (281). In this way, Micale suggests that hegemonic masculinity is defensively constructed in opposition to hysteria, which functions as a "medical metaphor for everything that male observers found mysterious or unmanageable in the opposite sex" (159); or more precisely, hysteria serves as a metaphor for what the hegemonic male finds intolerable in the constitution of his own sex.

Even when male hysteria was diagnosed, as it was in Charcot's work, there was still a gendered bias to separate and differentiate hysteria between the sexes. As Micale describes, Charcot's analysis of male hysteria patients would often follow a conventional division between private / public spheres, in which women's sickness was understood as occurring primarily in "domestic settings," where women experienced "overpowering emotional experience[s]" such as "marital turmoil, unrequited love," deaths in the family, or sexual abuse (156); on the other hand, men were perceived as suffering hysteria as consequence of physical injury incurred "in the public workplace," in accidents, as a result of being overworked, excessive drinking or in war trauma (157). Charcot went on to profile his patients' symptoms by dividing them along gendered lines. There was a tendency in Charcot's writings to link causal factors of hysteria with "prevailing notions of masculine and feminine natures," where "hysterical women suffer from an excess of 'feminine' behaviors, [and] hysterical men from an excess of 'masculine' behaviors" (Micale 157). Rather than pursuing the idea that the male mind contained a component of "mental and emotional femininity" (193), Charcot resisted calling into question patriarchal gender ideals. Indeed, in this early work on hysteria, hysteria as a response to trauma is constructed through a gendered framework through which dominant culture is reinforced, rather than challenged. Whether it is through the eyes of the victim, the violator, the analyst, a family member, a writer, or an artist, a traumatic event is contoured to a vision that often conforms to pre-existing gender norms and expectations.

Micale's interpretation of male hysteria is supported by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Michael S. Kimmel, both of whom have suggested that masculine subjectivity operates within the binary of heterosexual / homosexual. In Sedgwick's understanding, the hetero / homosexual relation is not really an opposition at all, but an "unsettled and dynamic tacit relation" of mutually dependent terms (10). In other words, instead of being naturally opposed to homosexuality, masculine heterosexuality in fact "depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of [homosexuality]" (10). As dependent, interrelated terms, heterosexuality and homosexuality are shifted from their seemingly fixed opposition. Sedgwick's notion of homosocial desire reinforces this instability by suggesting that men's highly emotionally charged relationships with other men create the basic structure of patriarchy. In this configuration, the bonds shared



between men within a patriarchal economy of power and privilege are not set in opposition with homosexuality; rather, there is a potential “continuum between homosocial and homosexual” (1). Sedgwick’s critical questioning of patriarchy underlines the homophobia and misogyny that are historically associated with hegemonic heterosexual masculinity: “male homosexual bonds may have a subsumed and marginalized relation to male heterosexuality similar to the relation of femaleness to maleness” (47). By taking a deconstructive approach to patriarchal structures, Sedgwick is able to illuminate masculinity in such a way that its careful construction as a fixed and static category is revealed, as well as its function in maintaining social stability through heterosexism, homophobia, and misogyny.

Similarly, Kimmel’s work in masculinity studies focuses on the power structures in and motives of male relationships. Kimmel sees the founding motivation for the behaviours and attitudes of male homosocial relationships as being the “need [for] men’s approval” (33). In other words, men desire the approval of other men to “improve their ranking on the masculine social scale” (33). This masculine economy of power and status functions through the circulation of women as a kind of “currency” or objects of exchange between men (33). Within this system, there is an implicit interdiction: a man cannot take the place of the female object that is circulated between men because such an act would compromise the boundaries securing male dominance. Kimmel affirms Sedgwick’s stance by suggesting that it is impossible to define heterosexual masculinity without differentiating it from the categories of homosexuality and femininity: “masculine identity is born in the renunciation of the feminine” (33) and functions as a form of “antifemininity” (34). This constant need to repudiate that which is characterized as feminine leaves masculine gender identity “tenuous and fragile” (32). Contrary to notions that hegemonic masculinity is innately powerful, Kimmel suggests that the “overriding emotion is fear” (35). Gendered violence, whether targeted at women, gays, or groups identified as “Others,”<sup>4</sup> is a defense mechanism against these forbidden fears.

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<sup>4</sup> My use of the term “Other” is derived from feminist and post-colonial discourses. Simone de Beauvoir uses the phrase “the Other” in reference to how masculine subjectivity is defined against an objectified femininity characterized as inferior, lacking and abject. For Beauvoir, “woman is consigned to the category of Other; the Other encompasses woman” (79). The phrase “the Other” is also used in the postcolonial

One can see the active suppression of these fears of feminine identification in the history of male hysteria, where the stories of men's fragility in traumatic situations were silenced or altered to fit the gender status quo. In *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media*, Elaine Showalter points out that during World War I a diagnosis of hysteria in the case of a male patient was the equivalent to emasculation, saying to him that "“you are not a man”" (77). The label of hysteric was viewed as "a sign of weakness, a castration in a word" (77). The continual feminization of male hysterics revealed systematic misogyny and homophobia within medical and military fields where male hysteria was most visible. To many doctors, the symptoms exhibited by male hysterics, including emotional distress, sensitivity, nervousness, passivity, mutism, and frailty, were an indication of latent or overt homosexuality. Showalter cites the work of Karl Abraham, a Freudian analyst, whose views on male "shellshock" patients indicate the homophobic bias in medical discourses. Abraham argued that "war neurotics were passive, narcissistic, and impotent men to begin with, whose latent homosexuality was brought to the surface by the all-male environment" (Abraham qtd. by Showalter 124). The pejorative labeling of "feminine characteristics" in men, the classifying of all male hysterics as homosexual, and indeed, the pathologizing of homosexuality, all point to a system wherein masculinity is rigidly defined through homophobic and misogynistic exclusions. In other words, the repudiation of male hysteria can be seen as the foundation of hegemonic masculine subjectivity. The structural opposition of hegemonic masculinity to both femininity and homosexuality maintains for masculinity an illusion of stability and dominance. Yet as queer theorists like Sedgwick and Kimmel have argued, and as emerging discourses on hysteria have illustrated, beyond the appearance of stability and coherence, beneath masculine gender identity runs an undercurrent of fear and vulnerability that should not be ignored.

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theories of Edward Said to discuss how Western culture has traditionally seen the East or "Orient" as being "inferior" and "Other" (xvii). In this context, my use of the term "the Other" or "Otherness" carries connotations of what is repudiated from the hegemonic model of white, heterosexual masculinity and projected onto those individuals who do not conform or who are oppressed by patriarchal culture.

As argued by Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Jonathan Dollimore, and Julia Kristeva, interpersonal violence often results from this repudiation, used punitively to preserve the boundaries of identity (both individual and collective), as well as to purge or abject the feared or anxiety-inducing Otherness that lies within oneself. The condition of “gender dis-ease” causes the male subject to split or dissociate between dual parts of identity: private / public, inside / outside, Self / Other, fantasy / reality. Splitting is also accompanied by projection, where certain qualities or characteristics that are feared or produce anxiety within the self are repudiated and projected onto the Other. Here it is a person or group who comes to embody the “Otherness” that one denies within oneself. In this regard, violence is another pathological symptom of the patriarchal social order, where it is enacted to preserve the status quo.

Under patriarchal constraints, the divisive structure of gender and sexuality produces fear and anxiety within men who feel themselves at odds with the construction of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, because masculinity is so narrowly defined by its non-femininity and by its ideals of dominance, control, and mastery, the majority of men may feel “unworthy, incomplete, and inferior” when set against this impossible standard (Goffman 78). When manhood is equated with dominance, boys and men are given very little choice in regards to how they perform their masculinity. Indeed, the authors included in this study depict cultural moments in which hypermasculinity has become the norm, supported by patriarchal-military culture with its glorification of violent masculinity. Rather than seeing or accepting masculine violence as natural or normal, these authors suggest the need to challenge the patriarchal configurations of gender and sexuality that have allowed masculine violence to flourish.

In texts such as *Perfume*, *Disgrace*, and *The Wars*, sadistic violence is depicted in order to reveal its status as a symptom of patriarchal culture, a pathological form of masculine gender expression. As Kimmel writes, “Violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood” (189). In a way, violence can be seen as a language that asserts masculinity. Yet, this particular form of expression, like hysteria, uses the body to signify feelings that are repressed or silenced under societal constraints. For the male characters in Pierce’s *Boys Don’t Cry* and McEwan’s “Homemade,” the disavowal of masculine fears and anxieties, as well as the collective shame and silencing of the

experience of inadequacy, failure, and vulnerability, all contribute to social conditions that produce a violent masculinity. A “crisis of masculinity” is depicted through the violent discontent enacted by the boys and men depicted in the literary and cinematic narratives of this study. By situating this current “crisis” in the context of masculine hysteria, I highlight the repudiation of femininity in the violence of characters such as Doc Hata in *A Gesture Life* and Grenouille in *Perfume*. Indeed, in Lee’s *A Gesture Life*, Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, Findley’s *The Wars*, and McEwan’s “Homemade,” masculine violence illustrates the link between hegemonic constructions of masculinity and the legacy of military violence and trauma.

The authors included in this study depict the dangers of hegemonic masculinity and suggest the potential of a social constructionist approach, wherein sex and gender function ideologically rather than serving a biological imperative. The ideological focus around which hegemonic masculine gender identity is consistently organized is the “commensurability of penis and phallus” (Silverman 15). Kaja Silverman argues that the ideological equation of penis and phallus is the “dominant fiction” through which masculinity defines itself (16). Within a Lacanian theoretical context, the dominant ideology that structures gender relations functions through a denial of masculine lack, where “both the male and female subject . . . deny all knowledge of male castration” (Silverman 42). In this false belief, male subjects can claim the power and privilege associated with the Phallic signifier.

Silverman’s critical analysis of gender ideology points to a process of displacement, wherein the female or feminized Other becomes a target for the projected fears, anxieties, and shame disavowed through the male subject’s denial of inadequacy or castration (46). This displacement onto a female or feminized Other can be understood as an enactment of male hysteria, a defensive strategy that marks patriarchy as pathological. It is clear that the mistreatment of male hysterics reveals the displaced fears of many men. Following from this understanding, one can see how castration, as supposedly embodied in male hysteria, presents an existential crisis, wherein masculine subjectivity ceases to maintain its hegemonic form. However, this crisis of masculinity creates gaps in the dominant order of gender, allowing alternate subjectivities to emerge. The voices and stories that have been actively suppressed reappear from behind the monolithic shadow of

Phallic masculinity. Literary narratives of male hysteria exemplify this shifting discourse that explores alternative masculinities. Challenging the penis / Phallus equation also opens up new paths of critical analysis in masculinity studies.

To affirm masculine castration in the symbolic order is to acknowledge the vulnerabilities inherent in the male body. Needless to say, such recognition can be traumatic, considering the long-standing conflation of masculinity with transcendence.<sup>5</sup> The male body, apart from its symbolic associations, is marked like any human body by fragility, infirmity, and disorder. To acknowledge this weakness is to face one's own abjection. It is to acknowledge that what is despised in the Other actually exists in one's self. In *The Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva has described this confrontation with the abject. As she describes it, abjection is the process of expulsion from the social or symbolic order of that which is a threat to the borders of personal or group identity (69). The reaction to the abject is horror caused by its "shatter[ing] the wall of repression . . . . It takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away" (Kristeva 15). In patriarchal societies, the body of the woman / mother is abjected as a source of filth and defilement, while through the fiction of "his sovereign being" (84) the male body is "defended, protected . . . . sublimated" (78) from this defilement. As Kristeva argues, the boundaries between masculine and feminine must remain separate or risk the disintegration of social order. In this way, the male hysteric can also be seen as occupying a femininized position of the abject in relation to hegemonic masculinity. The male hysteric is cast out to the threshold of hegemonic masculinity, where he marks and threatens the limits and boundaries of patriarchy.

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<sup>5</sup> In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir discusses the symbolic associations of the male body with transcendence, where male subjectivity is designated by an active, creative, powerful consciousness that extends his influence out into the world. Subsequently, female subjectivity is "doom[ed] . . . to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and for ever transcended by another ego which is essential and sovereign" (xxxv). The immanence of the female subject is viewed as an oppressive prison of stagnation, passivity, and the constraints of biology; in this configuration, the male subject ideologically escapes his biological lack or loss through ideological construction and the continuance of power inequalities between the sexes.

### **Engendering Trauma: The Return of the Repressed**

In the previous section, hysteria was shown to be a mental and emotional disturbance, connected with gender expectations but not exclusive to a particular sex. With the works of Charcot, the study of the disorder evolved from its mythical roots as a physical condition to its modern incarnation as a psychological affliction triggered by a traumatic event. Freud's early work with both male and female hysterics also traced the origins of the disease to a traumatic event, most often a seduction experienced in pre-pubescence. As Charles Bernheimer asserts, "Freud's papers of 1896 paint a frightening picture of contemporary sexual life in which prepubescent children are regularly the victims of adult sexual molestation" (12). In his early work, Freud documents the disturbing cycles of abuse that circulated within the domestic sphere, where abusive behaviour transpired through family relationships and through the domestic staff to whose care children were "thoughtlessly entrusted" (12). The effects of the kind of sexual trauma that Freud describes are shown to have a delayed onset, where the victim's conflicted sexual feelings often reemerge during adulthood (13). Rather than being expressed in words, these conflicted feelings often appear as bodily symptoms, resulting from repression of memories of the initial trauma. When the trauma is sexual in nature, the likelihood of the event being repressed is greater, although this differs depending on historical and cultural contexts. Repression of sexual violation is a form of latent censorship preventing open discussion of the traumatic experience.

As identified by Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, feelings of "doubt and humiliation, . . . guilt and shame" can prevent individuals from recounting their traumatic past (178). These constraints prevent the traumatized subject from assimilating the experience into conscious thought or expressing his or her repressed memories and feelings through conventional forms of written or spoken discourse. As van der Kolk and van der Hart describe, "Traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language" (176). In other words, traumatic memory needs to be transformed into narrative memory or an integrated story of the past (163). For this process of integration to occur, the traumatized person must "return to the memory often in order to complete it" (176). If traumatic memories remain censored and

repressed, then post-traumatic symptoms can occur. In this way, the symptoms of the trauma victim can be interpreted as a form of body language, where symptomatic behaviour communicates physically what the subject has not been able or allowed to speak out loud. If trauma is experienced in the social context of a repressive culture, the individual can experience this censorship as a second form of traumatic victimization. As Judith Herman states, “A supportive response from other people may mitigate the impact of the event, while a hostile or negative response may compound the damage and aggravate the traumatic syndrome” (61). Under patriarchy, blaming of victims and disavowal of their experiences are prevalent. As Laura S. Brown argues, within dominant culture there is tendency to exclude or ignore “private, secret, insidious” and interpersonal trauma, in which battery, sexual abuse, rape and incest are included, and blame the victims “for what happened to them” (122). The experiences of already marginalized people, those marked by differences of sex, race, class, sexual orientation or ability, are often silenced and disavowed in patriarchal culture.

Brown’s argument that abuse and sexual violence are so widespread and of such high incidence, and that violence is integrated into our culture as the “normal” or “natural” condition of gender relations, reveals a disturbing character of dominant culture. It was this high occurrence of sexual violence within the dominant culture that ultimately could not be accepted by Freud, who could not indict the patriarchal society in which he belonged (Masson xx). Freud would eventually disavow his theory by positing the abuses and seductions as infantile fantasies, rather than maintain his earlier hypothesis that sadistic violence was endemic to patriarchal society. With this insight, actual sexual violation of the individual soon becomes only marginally significant in relation to Freud’s shifting theoretical position. Eventually, he would come to theorize seduction by parental figures as a construct of infantile fantasy and wish fulfillment, thus marking a significant shift in discourses of hysteria (Bernheimer 14).

While hysterics have been viewed as malingerers, liars, and mimics, and have had their symptomatic expressions condemned as melodramatic theatrics, this characterization is arguably due more to socio-cultural devaluations of femininity than to an accurate assessment of the traumatized individual. The perceived difference between sickness and health is a construction that is intricately tied to gender, where emotional,

psychological, and physical health and robustness are culturally associated with masculinity. However, the gendering of the male body as the pinnacle of strength, vitality, and vigor is destabilized in the spectacle of the male hysteric. The subversive quality of masculine infirmity challenges the prevailing gender norms separating masculine health and vigor from feminine weakness and frailty.

Indeed, hysteria is no longer used a diagnostic label in current psychiatric literature, its symptoms having been replaced by or resituated into other medical categories (Micale, "On the Disappearance" 525). Instead, hysteria has become a concept central to psychoanalytic, feminist, and cultural thought. Drawing on the view that hysteria is a form of embodied critique of patriarchy, that "sickness" is a metaphor for the misogyny and homophobia of hegemonic masculinity, my argument extends the social-political force of hysteria studies to include a critical analysis of how sexual violence is so normalized and naturalized within dominant culture that its effects touch the lives of all those who are perceived to be vulnerable, different, or "Other" in patriarchal culture. In the narratives that I will discuss, I acknowledge how, as Showalter states, hysteria is "a son's disease" (288) as it both exposes and presupposes the disturbing sickness inherent in patriarchal culture. In this way, like Laura S. Brown, I engage trauma theory from a gendered perspective, positioning patriarchal culture as the source of both physical violence and psychological pain.

According to Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery*, hysteria can be seen as an earlier term for "rape trauma syndrome" or "post-traumatic stress disorder," otherwise referred to as PTSD (31). Although the DSM-IV does not recognize hysteria in its definition of PTSD, both conditions share common symptoms:

The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror. The characteristic symptoms resulting from the exposure to the extreme trauma include persistent reexperiencing of the traumatic event, persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness, and persistent symptoms of increased arousal. (DSM-IV-TR 468)

Like hysteria, PTSD is a condition that can persist long after the traumatic experience initially occurred. This link between PTSD and hysteria is evident in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he reports observing the "traumatic neurosis" (12) of war



veterans of World War I and remarks on how they seemed “fixat[ed] to the experience” (13) as well as experienced a “compulsion to repeat” (19) or return to the traumatic experience in flashbacks or nightmares. While Freud remarks on the similarity of war neurosis and hysteria, he also notes the greater severity of traumatic neurosis:

The symptomatic picture presented by traumatic neurosis approaches that of hysteria in the wealth of its similar motor symptoms, but surpasses it as a rule in its strongly marked signs of subjective ailment (in which it resembles hypochondria or melancholia) as well as in the evidence it gives of a far more comprehensive general enfeeblement and disturbance of the mental capacities. (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 12)

This difference, although slight, is enough to construct a distinction between feminized hysteria and the symptoms experienced by male war veterans. Like Freud’s distinction of traumatic neurosis from hysteria, the medical literature on PTSD also excludes or distances itself from hysteria.

Unlike hysteria, which has a long history of gender differentiation built into its diagnosis, the DSM-IV makes no note of gender in its PTSD diagnostic criteria. The diagnosis of PTSD is determined through an analysis of the patient’s exposure to a traumatic event and his or her persistent re-experiencing of the trauma through a range of behaviours, thoughts or feelings. The traumatic event can occur on a mass scale, such as warfare, or it can be an isolated event affecting a single person. In recent years, news about rape being used as a weapon of warfare<sup>6</sup> has exposed the relation between personal, insidious trauma and the mass trauma. While PTSD carries no explicit references to gender differentiation in its diagnosis, critics like Showalter, Herman, Rachel Yehuda and Cheryl Wong argue that a shadow of hysteria remains embedded in the recent

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<sup>6</sup> UNICEF online identifies systematic rape as a weapon of war. Conflicts in Rwanda, Bosnia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sudan are among recent examples where sexual violence was used as a military tactic. As a tool of “ethnic cleansing,” rape also serves the purpose of destroying communities, social values, and subsequent generations, in addition to the harm and damage to individual lives. As reported in the article, in Bosnia “more than 20,000 Muslim girls and women have been raped,” where many “impregnated girls have been forced to bear the ‘enemy’s’ child.” Not only do female rape survivors face pregnancy and health consequences such as STD’s, but also many are “ostracized by their families and communities.”

constructions of trauma and its effects. For instance, despite the gender neutrality of PTSD criteria, there continues to be a stigma attached to male / masculine subjects who experience trauma, particularly in cases of sexual assault, where gender codes are transgressed in the experience of male victimization. Arguably, victim and perpetrator roles sustain a rigid gender division that casts victims, regardless of their sex, in a feminized position and perpetrators in a masculine role. For example, we might look at the Abu Ghraib controversy of 2004, where Iraqi detainees were exposed to acts of brutal physical, psychological, and sexual violence. In the photographs that were released, a female soldier takes on a masculine perpetrator role, posing in a vulgar display of macho bravado while forcing the male detainees to perform their tortured display of sexually exploited behaviour (Figure 2). Feelings of shame and humiliation are also compounded by the configurations of culture and gender in this case; the racialized male victims (Muslim men) are forced to take on a feminized position, forced to submit passively to sexual degradation at the hands of their white masculinized perpetrators.<sup>7</sup> Like the photographic evidence of hysterics taken for medical discourse, the spectacle of Abu Ghraib illuminates how formations of trauma and shame cannot be viewed separately from the contexts of gender, race, and class through which they are constructed.

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<sup>7</sup> As reported by David Rosen, there was extensive sadistic sexual torture used on detainees at Abu Ghraib, which included “forcing detainees to remove their clothing and keeping them naked for several days at a time; videotaping and photographing naked male and female detainees; forcibly arranging detainees in various sexually explicit positions for photographing; forcing naked male detainees to wear women’s underwear; forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate themselves while being photographed and videotaped; arranging naked male detainees in a pile and then jumping on them; positioning a naked detainee on a MRE [meals ready to eat] box, with a sandbag on his head, and attaching wires to his fingers, toes, and penis to simulate electric torture; placing a dog chain or strap around a naked detainee’s neck and having a female soldier pose for a picture; sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broom stick.”



Figure 2: Abu Ghraib torture and prisoner abuse

While reactions to trauma inevitably reflect gendered structures, it is possible to respond to trauma in ways that are inclusive rather than prejudicial and divisive. Despite the seeming gender neutrality of PTSD, the scientific classification of the disorder cannot definitely predict how families, peer groups, legal institutions, and social institutions such as one's church or workplace influence the constructions of the victim, violator, or traumatic event. One of my aims in this dissertation is to address the cultural construction of trauma within the binary framework that sustains gender norms through oppositions of fragility and strength, irrationality and reason, emotionality and detachment. As Hélène Cixous has argued, the disparity of power associated with the binary system operates in relation to the "man / woman" couple, where the feminized victim traditionally occupies the subject position of fragile and irrational Other ("Sorties" 64). In this context, to be masculine is to be strong and rational in the face of trauma, despite feeling fear and anxiety. The literary and cinematic texts included in this study challenge these oppositional structures by illustrating how masculine subjects can and do occupy positions of physical and emotional vulnerability. The depictions of sexual trauma in Findley's *The Wars*, McEwan's "Homemade" and Süskind's *Perfume* highlight how anxiety and a sense of vulnerability underlie constructions of masculinity as much as femininity. As well, these narratives show that gender constructions of both masculinity and femininity are sustained through fear, where the fear and the experience of sexual violence are linked ideologically to maintain dominant sex / gender systems.

### **The Talking Cure: Truth and Recovery through Narrative**

In the narratives of Gaiman, Süskind, McEwan, Lee, Coetzee, Findley, and Peirce, literary strategies play an important role in sharing knowledge and insight into the traumatic experience. By listening to and reading narratives that depict trauma and its causes, the reader / audience gains new insights into the experiences of victims and the unconscious motives of perpetrators of patriarchal violence. Each of the texts included in this study employs literary strategies to promote an empathetic response in the reader / audience. In Section One, Süskind, Gaiman, and McEwan draw from Gothic traditions to produce strong responses in the reader; the reader responds to these Gothic texts with feelings of empathy for the victims of violence as well as gaining insight into the disturbed psyches of masculine violators. The Gothic depictions of human monstrosity upset the reader's complacency by exposing the horrors of patriarchal violence. Intertextuality is also used in Süskind, Gaiman and McEwan in relation to literary figures like de Sade, Faustus and Byron as a means to convey the disturbing continuity of sexual violence among patriarchal heroes. In Section Two, Lee and Coetzee utilize certain literary motifs to create empathy in the reader. For instance, Lee's textual rendering of Hata's haunting memories of Khutaeh inspires the reader to feel empathy for Hata in his continuing traumatic repression of the past. In Coetzee's text, the depiction of Lurie's shifting response to wounded and abandoned dogs engenders empathy in the reader, transforming the reader's vision of Lurie from a callous, sexual predator to a more sympathetic figure. In Section Three, Findley enables the reader to feel Ross's struggles with the constraints of hegemonic masculinity by depicting metaphorically the fragmentation and panic of Ross's mind. Finally, Pierce's fictionalization of Brandon Teena's life elevates the empathetic response of the audience through its romantic storyline, and its creation of suspense leading up to Brandon's murder, which allows the audience to identify and empathize with Brandon.

While literary and cinematic texts utilize strategies that differ from the psychoanalytic narratives of trauma, both literary and psychoanalytic narratives can be understood as promoting healing through empathy. It was through his work with hysterics that Freud developed the idea of the "talking cure," a term actually coined by Freud's hysteria patient Anna O. to describe the basic foundation of psychoanalytic

method (B. Morris 88). Healing and recovery from hysteria were believed to be assisted by the recounting of “feelings and past experiences” (88). This model of psychoanalysis highlights the important therapeutic qualities of storytelling in the transformation of traumatic memory. As Herman describes in her discussion of recovery, “the ‘action of telling a story’ in the safety of a protected relationship can actually produce a change in the abnormal processing of traumatic memory. With this transformation of memory comes relief of many of the major symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder” (183). The therapeutic function of narrative is partially due to the process of integration, where cohesiveness and meaning can be ascribed to traumatic memories (van der Kolk & van der Hart 176). In psychoanalysis, narrative is a powerful medium of change in the trauma survivor by allowing unprocessed and overwhelming traumatic memories to be assimilated and understood within a context of a healing, supportive relationship. The act of narrating the past also allows the victim / survivor to gain a sense of validation. As Kali Tal argues, “Literature of trauma is written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it real both to the victim and to the community. Such writing serves both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author” (137). However, while narrative can be an important and necessary step towards healing, it is not enough in itself to change the traumatic conditions of patriarchal culture. Trauma literature, including both narratives of trauma survivors and narratives that depict trauma, can inspire shifts or transformations of consciousness; however, without collective social action to eradicate the inequalities of power, the toxic violence of patriarchal culture will continue.

In this process of healing and transformation, sharing one’s story to a receptive audience who empathizes and understands is critically important. As Dori Laub explains, “the arrival of a fully present and committed listener. . . allow[s] memory, and with it, narrative, to flow again. What is needed for healing is the creation of a testimonial community” (264). In this way, the dialectical encounter between speaker and listener, in which there develops a relationship of empathy and understanding, can also be seen as a social model for addressing and recovering from the pathology of patriarchal culture. Ferenczi’s model of psychotherapy as an empathetic connection stands out as exemplary of the therapeutic connection that could potentially transform the pathology of patriarchal

culture, particularly its prejudicial structure. Specifically, Ferenczi's approach emphasized "his sensitivity to human suffering and his high degree of imaginative power" (De Forest 120). Ferenczi practiced empathy as a means to transform and bring healing to his patients; in this way, his approach calls for empathy as the "corrective emotional experience" to overcome a history of trauma and deprivation (Rachman 21).

Laura S. Brown reinforces the importance of empathy, arguing that the first step towards changing the traumatic conditions of dominant culture is to recognize and "re-tell the lost truths of pain among us" (132) and listen to this re-telling. In this way, sharing stories of trauma and suffering, stories that expose the horrors that are enacted every day as part of "normal" patriarchal gender relations, promotes change and healing. Through the telling of trauma, patriarchal culture is revealed as a pathological force that is responsible for "the immediacy and frequency of traumatic events in daily life" (Brown 132); as well, through listening, and reading, empathy grows, and eventually an empathetic community is created. As Brown states, affirming the "survivor's experience of psychic trauma requires that we change our vision of what is 'human' to a more inclusive image, and moves us to a radical re-visioning of our understanding of the human condition" (132). Rather than ignore or exclude the marginalized subjectivities of feminized Others, Brown suggests that we do the opposite: listen, learn from, include, identify with, and empathize with the Other.

In so far as readers are able to identify empathetically with the anxiety and vulnerability depicted in narratives of sexual violence, there is an opportunity to resist patriarchal ideology that constrains social relations through binary divisions of male and female, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual. The divisiveness of an "Us" versus "Them" mentality prevents us from seeing and experiencing the commonalities amongst us as positive, meaningful connections rather than threats to the status quo. The texts included within this study challenge the reader to establish commonalities across the boundaries of time, place, nation, class, gender and sexual orientation. By using narrative strategies that inspire empathy and critique, these narratives broaden our understanding of human experience by effectively portraying the real-life horrors that are often repressed or ignored, as well as the subjectivities of those individuals who are marginalized and silenced by trauma. At times horrifying and

disturbing, the narratives of Gaiman, Süskind, McEwan, Lee, Coetzee, Findley, and Peirce make their reader recognize the terror and grief caused through the gender norms of patriarchal culture. As readers and audiences of trauma literature, it is our responsibility to listen and learn; only then, can we translate a consciousness of empathy and understanding into progressive social change.

## SECTION ONE

### Male Violators and Castration Anxiety in Contemporary Gothic Literature

In the Gothic tradition, authors such as Edgar Allen Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and R.L. Stevenson have represented unspeakable horrors by drawing upon the complex psychology of the human mind. Specifically, the motifs of monstrosity and transgression of social and sexual norms are implicit in their representations of horror.<sup>8</sup> Recent authors have taken up this inquiry into psychopathology in the Gothic tradition to illustrate how some fears originate not from outside the self in the form of supernatural horrors, but from within. Authors including Patrick Süskind, Neil Gaiman, Ian McEwan, and filmmakers like Kimberly Peirce have produced narratives that horrify their audiences by representing insidious evils in the minds and actions of seemingly ordinary men. According to Catherine Spooner, this emphasis on sexual politics marks a significant shift from early Gothic texts: “post-Freud, Marx and feminism, [Gothic literature] has gained a sexual and political self-consciousness unavailable to the earliest Gothic novelists” (23). While sexual deviance is a sub-text of traditional Gothic literature like Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the explicit and self-conscious critique of patriarchy is a contemporary approach to the genre. For authors such as Süskind, Gaiman and McEwan in particular, it is less the supernatural or demonic forces that engender horrific violence than the normative qualities of hegemonic masculinity. Specifically, in Süskind’s *Perfume*, Gaiman’s “Calliope” and McEwan’s “Homemade” the qualities of ambition, entitlement, autonomy, qualities that are associated with conventional masculinity, become malevolent forces. With the exception

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<sup>8</sup> Stories like Poe’s “The Oval Portrait” and Hawthorne’s “The Birthmark” can be read as depictions of social-sexual transgression and the monstrosity of ordinary men, where in each story the male creative genius is indirectly responsible for the death of his wife. In “The Birthmark,” the male protagonist inadvertently kills his wife while trying to remove her birthmark through his scientific methods. In “The Oval Portrait” a husband is so passionate about his art that he does not see how the process is draining his wife of her life energy. Stoker’s *Dracula* and Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* can also be read as evocative of the sexual anxieties of the Victorian period (Spooner 22); dark desires and sexual transgression underlie the monstrosity of each story.



of Süskind's character Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, who possesses an extraordinary sense of smell, the male protagonists of these authors are indistinguishable from ordinary men. Each male character strives for success and individuation among his peers, but what distinguishes these men is the extent to which they pursue these ideals of masculine gender identity. In particular, the male protagonists in these contemporary Gothic narratives commit horrific acts of rape, murder, or incest as part of the process of creating a masculine identity.

In this way, these male characters represent an intertwining of masculine self-definition and sexual violence, where gender identity is realized through horrific forms of sexual violation and abjection of the female body. Each narrative features the process of defining masculinity and constructing an idealized masculine persona, where conformity to gender ideals of ambition and autonomy overshadows all considerations of human compassion. In each narrative, masculine self-definition is linked to an ambitious drive to possess and master women as a way to gain power. Whether the aim is literary stardom in Gaiman, eminence in perfumery in Süskind, or admiration among male peers in McEwan, it is each character's desire to acquire a sense of power over other people that compels him towards violence against women. Violence in these texts occurs through patriarchal economies of acquisition, where it is women, and women's bodies in particular, that function as the material basis of accumulation and possession.<sup>9</sup>

It is my argument that rape is not solely a vengeful desecration of another man's property as part of a homosocial economy of power, but also an act carrying a deeper psychological desire for entitlement and omnipotence. Patriarchal value systems ensure

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<sup>9</sup> The correlation between masculine ambition and denigration of the female body has been seen as paradigmatic of patriarchal dominance. Feminist theorists including Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray have asserted that patriarchy is a male-driven economy of power that relegates women to being objects of circulation and possession. As de Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex*, the introduction of private property positioned man as "proprietor of women" (63). It is through the acquisition of woman as objects "that man seeks to signify his own self-value" (63). Irigaray takes up this argument when she discusses "hom(m)o-sexuality," her term for the "exchange of women as goods [that] accompanies and stimulates exchanges of other 'wealth' among groups of men" (*This Sex* 172). In this exchange, men's "self-value" and "wealth" are their power, specifically what Irigaray calls "a power of the Phallus" (183), where the term "Phallus" refers to a "transcendent value" (183) that organizes the symbolic order of language and meaning.

that masculine power is symbolically tied to violence and violation of feminized Others. It is as if the act of raping a woman enables the violator to penetrate symbolically as well as physically, penetrate into the unknown properties of femininity itself, allowing him to seize by force the knowledge that continually eludes him. Here, the dual meanings of “rape,” its current meaning of forced sexual intercourse and its archaic meaning of seizure of property, imply that rape signifies the will not only to dominate the female Other, but also to possess the symbolic value of the female body, a will that underlies discourses of sexual violation. In this sense, the female body is invested with both economic value as item of exchange and symbolic value as the object of men’s fascination.

Understood in this way, the act of rape can be read in Oedipal terms, as veiling, hiding men’s castration anxiety. In taking up the perpetrator position, men enact a masculinity that is predatory and punitive. Acts of rape, incest, and sexual abuse of female or feminized victim are committed as a symbolic silencing or destruction of female power, as an attack on other men’s power by making women “damaged goods,” and as a symbolic denial of castration anxieties. In this way, the violator views not only his victim but also himself as a fantasized object: the victim is the castrated Other, who symbolizes weakness and fragility, while through this act of projection the perpetrator views himself as omnipotent and phallic. This splitting or dissociation that results in the perpetrator’s identification with the Phallus corresponds with an illusory and idealized persona, where the body can be readily used as weapon or “instrument of power with which to master maternal [female] power” and disavow abjection (Irigaray, “Body Against Body” 17).

Denial of castration is central to the masculine persona represented in Gothic literature. For example, in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein’s obsession with mastering the creative life force is motivated by his masculine pride and ambition. However, once Frankenstein’s illusion shatters and his creation is shown to be monstrous, his ambitious pride is replaced by fear, loss and lack. Contemporary Gothic authors reveal a latent structure in patriarchy of fear and resentment of female embodiment, where it is the association of women’s bodies with maternal power and fertile creativity that drives the male characters towards sadistic acts driven by a desire for possession.

Süskind, Gaiman and McEwan represent masculine fears and desires not only to engender a sense of horror in their reading audience, but also to undermine male mastery in its forceful claims to power and control. By representing the latent fears and the hollow status of masculine personae, these contemporary authors add a level of social critique to the Gothic tradition. In this way, it is possible to read gender dis-ease in these male characters through their self-fashioning of masculine personae, where their outward appearance of power and control obscures their abjection and fear of inadequacy. As each male character crafts a façade of masculinity, he engages in an act of auto-genesis, a rebirth of sorts, where he tries to separate himself as a masculine subject from his origins and dependence on the maternal body.<sup>10</sup> Masculine self-fashioning is a product of a masculine symbolic order that controls and suppresses the archaic woman-mother; yet, even in this symbolic order, a remainder continues to haunt the unconscious of the masculine subject.<sup>11</sup>

By using a Kristevan theoretical context, it is possible to view the male figures in these contemporary Gothic narratives as representing the social and sexual fears engendered when men cross the thresholds of normative masculine identity, when seemingly ordinary men become monsters through a transformation of masculinity gone awry. As Kristeva illustrates through the example of Oedipus, seemingly sovereign, rational male subjects are compelled by “a desire to know” that which remains on the “other side constituted by the *other sex*” (83). For Oedipus, this “desire to know” leads him to murder his father and to enter into an incestuous marriage to his own mother. The revelation of his transgressive behaviour leads to his masochistic self-blinding. Oedipus’s

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<sup>10</sup> In “Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother,” Irigaray describes how the symbolic death and silencing of the woman-mother is the defining act in the establishment of patriarchal social order, and the separation-individuation of all men. The intervention of the father, of patriarchal law, and the imposition of the phallus as a replacement for the womb all function to “privileg[e] the male sex” (14) through a symbolic murder of the woman-mother.

<sup>11</sup> In “Body Against Body” Irigaray suggests that while the creative power of the woman-mother is negated in the male symbolic world, there is also the presence of “castration anxiety” in the sovereign male subject that acts as “an unconscious reminder of the sacrifice that consecrated the phallic erection as unique sexual value” (17).

blinding is taken by Kristeva to be a form of castration, symbolizing the heretofore sovereign being as abject, both mortal and lacking (88).<sup>12</sup>

The myth of Oedipus reveals the alignment between sexual violation and the desire for mastery. Gaining the knowledge and experiencing a forbidden sexuality confirms the violator's defiance of the realms of morality and reason; to cross the borderline between consensual sex and nonconsensual sex is to break the social contract. By violating the boundaries of human decency, these perpetrators are no longer considered men but sub-human, animalistic beings; in other words, they are monsters. Following from Oedipal myth and Kristeva's theory of abjection, a process of transformation in male protagonists of Gothic literature can be determined, where male protagonists shift from the illusion of omnipotence to the knowledge of their own monstrous abjection. In Gothic narratives depicting sexual violence it is the male protagonists' drive for mastery that ultimately sparks this crisis of masculine identity, when claims to power and control give over to monstrosity and aggression.

Emphasizing the fragility of masculine identities, and the ever-present dread of castration, contemporary gothic authors situate the horror of abjection on the borderline of everyday masculinity. Masculine subjectivity, as conveyed by these authors, is invested with a dis-ease that is both familiar and alien to their audiences. This disturbing familiarity of masculinity derives from the Freudian notion of "the uncanny," where "what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar" (Freud, "The Uncanny" 220). By pushing masculine subjects to extremes of entitlement and possession, these authors create a sense of horror by rendering masculine sadism in violently graphic and disturbing forms. Yet, it is the seeming ordinariness of this sadism and abjection that is truly frightening.

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<sup>12</sup> Freud also discusses how blinding or the fear of blinding acts as a substitute for castration or castration anxiety. In his essay "The Uncanny," Freud describes how "dreams, phantasies and myths [have] taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated" (231). Oedipus's self-blinding is a form of punishment or retribution for his acts of incest and murder, where blinding is "simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration" (231).

## Chapter One

### **Matricide, Misogyny, and all the Makings of a God in Patrick Süskind's *Perfume***

Published as a novel in 1985, Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* has been a worldwide bestseller for over a decade and has been translated into more than twenty-five languages (Gray 489). The universal appeal of the novel is due in part to its blend of genres, allusions to world literature,<sup>13</sup> and sensational subject matter of sex and violence. Critics have contemplated the novel's generic structure, viewing it through the lens of historiographic fiction, the *Künstlerroman* and postmodern pastiche, and in relation to fantasy, criminal noir and Gothic literary traditions. Arguably, the novel can also be read as exemplary of transgressive fiction, producing an ambivalent effect of repulsion and attraction that draws the reader into the territory of sexual violence and criminal depravity. In the story, Grenouille, a social outcast and orphan born with an extraordinary sense of smell, becomes obsessed with creating the ultimate perfume so that he may gain absolute power. To accomplish this feat, he begins to murder female virgins in order to extract their scents. Between the sensory overload of Süskind's writing style and the deplorable nature of the protagonist who practices monstrous misogyny in his treatment of young women, the novel challenges its reading audience to view Grenouille as the product of a pathological, morally corrupt and economically exploitative social order.

Most critics of the novel recognize the significance of the historical setting in eighteenth-century France during the Enlightenment, identifying a level of social commentary or critique in Süskind's portrayal of rationality used perversely to gain power and to control others. Jeffrey Adams and Nicholas Vanzsonyi see Grenouille as a fascist dictator, comparing him to Hitler and his ascent to power to the rise of the Third Reich. Adams, Richard Gray, and Lorna Milne among others identify the strand of extreme rationality found in Enlightenment intellectual and scientific culture to be

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<sup>13</sup> The many allusions to world literature in *Perfume* have been detailed in numerous critical articles. See Michael Fischer, Joachim Kaiser, Judith Ryan and Marcel Reich Ranicki for a more complete discussion of how Süskind's text includes allusions to Flaubert, Balzac, Baudelaire, Thomas Mann, E.T.A. Hoffmann, and so on.

present in Grenouille's authoritarian claims to power and control. In Grenouille's ascent to power, his role as an artist or creative genius is also discussed by Adams, Bruce E. Fleming, Manfred Jacobson and Neil Donahue, who view Süskind's novel as a contemporary *Künstlerroman*, a tale of an artist's development from childhood to maturity. In this case, Grenouille as artist / creator is also criminally minded or monstrous in his pursuit of mastery, sacrificing human beings to achieve his aesthetic ambitions. My reading of Grenouille's ascent to power and aesthetic ambition not only recognizes the values of Enlightenment culture and the rich literary tradition of the *Künstlerroman*, but also adds to the novel's criticism by using a feminist perspective to analyze the representations of gender and power in the text.

Grenouille's psychopathology is also of interest for critics who determine his anti-social personality, identity fragmentation, delusions of grandeur, and attacks on others to be symptoms of a dis-eased mind that stems in part from an immoral society. Ed Moffatt approaches Grenouille from the perspective of schizophrenia, which he then associates with postmodernist fragmentation and decentred subjectivity. Jonathan Wooley also draws from psychoanalytic theory to trace the Freudian "uncanny" in the text as a means to critique what is repressed in Enlightenment culture. My reading of Grenouille's pathological personality begins with an analysis of castration anxiety in the masculine unconscious and finds this gender anxiety to underlie Grenouille's misogynistic exploitation of female Others, construction of a godlike, phallic persona, and eventual masochistic self-destruction.

From the opening paragraph of Süskind's novel, the "arrogance, misanthropy, immorality, . . . [and] wickedness" of his protagonist, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, are shown to be fuelled by "ambition" (3). Grenouille is aligned with the Marquis de Sade (3) to exemplify the threshold of immorality during this period of great economic and intellectual change. However, these depraved men are revealed to be not the outcasts of society, but rather the inevitable products of a culture attuned towards selfish ambition and the exploitation of others. Throughout the novel are tales of people willing to sacrifice the wellbeing of others for the purpose of gain. Grenouille, among others, not only uses others but also is used for his talents so that others may profit. In this way, Grenouille's deceitful and violent actions can be seen as typical of rather than alien to a

culture that thrives on the mistreatment of others. His actions are both a form of revenge for having been exploited and an inevitable repetition of the exploitation endemic to his society. Men like Grenouille and de Sade are not social pariahs, but rather conformists following the status quo of patriarchal exploitation and objectification, only doing so openly without the guise of social propriety.

A central part of what make Süskind's critique of exploitation so profound and disturbing is the blatant misogyny evident in Grenouille's violent use of women. Like de Sade's, Grenouille's creative ambitions are driven by a misogynistic impulse. However, where de Sade channeled his animosity into sexually transgressive writing, Grenouille uses the art of perfumery to give focus to his sadism. Specifically, his creative impulse is fuelled by an ideal: a master scent. Over the course of the novel, Grenouille goes to any length to possess this ideal, his quest ultimately leading him into transgressive, monstrous territory. His passion and ambition result in his serial murder of virginal women for the purpose of appropriating their scents. In this manner, he creates the ultimate perfume: a perfume that not only makes men and women love him, but also gives him absolute control over others. In this way, Grenouille comes to represent a phallocratic drive for power and control.

Part fairytale, part historical allegory, Süskind's novel horrifies its readers through Grenouille's monstrous immorality and sadistic mission of self-aggrandizement. Behind Grenouille's artistic genius and façade of power lie latent anxieties regarding his own state of lack or castration. For Grenouille, castration takes the form of a lack of an individual human odor, a scent he does not possess but must fashion through a façade of perfume. The *lack* at the heart of Grenouille's character shows that the psychological foundations of male dominance are a defense against castration. Grenouille's quest for the ultimate perfume becomes perversely tied to his narcissistic goal of becoming "Grenouille the Great" (126) and "the omnipotent god of scent" (155). To accomplish this ambitious feat, Grenouille must learn to disguise his weaknesses through a façade of power, which he achieves by manipulating scent to form a godlike identity. Behind Grenouille's performance of grandeur hides a frail, disfigured man with a hunchback, club-foot, pock-marked face, poor eyesight, and a complete lack of personal odor.

Indeed, perfume is a medium of self-expression that is complexly associated to sexuality, gender and identity. The history of perfume in Enlightenment culture can be viewed in the context of class and gender. As anthropologist Constance Classen argues, during the eighteenth century, perfume was considered the exclusive affectation of the aristocratic class, who used the expensive liquids to mask undesirable body odors in order to differentiate themselves from the lower classes. The poor were “associated with filth and stench” as part of their perceived “corruption” (83). Natural body odors were perceived as animalistic, uncivilized, and a sign of moral corruption. Subsequently, perfumes were linked with the extravagant lifestyle and elitism of the aristocratic class. Notably, the name “Grenouille,” French for “frog,” is also evidence of the association of smell with animalistic, unclean, uncivilized behaviours and traits that must be masked with perfume. Indeed, Grenouille is associated with primitive, almost sub-human characteristics that no doubt correspond with the aristocracy’s views of class differences. Gradually, Classen argues, as the aristocracy adapted to the modern capitalistic state the value of smell also diminished. Immanuel Kant deemed it the least important of the senses (50). As Classen argues, this devaluing of the olfactory within Enlightenment culture was due to its negative connotations as sensual gratification rather than scientific subject, as animalistic or “savage” rather than part of civilized social order, and as a “feminized” affectation or tool of sexual seduction.<sup>14</sup>

In this context of social change, Grenouille’s obsession with scent connotes the change and conflicts within the Enlightenment Age. Here, Grenouille’s manipulation of perfume is his means of social mobility, where he is able to mask his poverty and moral decay under the guise of an aristocratic identity. He is able to manipulate and eventually master scent-producing methods in accordance with scientific reasoning. To master scent, Grenouille also sadistically exploits those around him, most notably, women who embody the beauty and desire he longs to possess and control. In this depiction,

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<sup>14</sup> Constance Classen elaborates on the devaluation of scent as a scientific discourse of inquiry and its relation to gender: “Beginning with the Enlightenment, smell had been increasingly devalued as a means of conveying or acquiring essential truths . . . . Sight, instead, had become the pre-eminent means and metaphor for discovery and knowledge, the sense par excellence of science. Sight, therefore, increasingly became associated with men, who – as explorers, scientists, politicians or industrialists – were perceived as discovering and dominating the world through their keen gaze” (84).



Grenouille represents a masculine creative genius, selfishly exploitative and consumed by his obsessive pursuit of greatness.

The misogynistic impulse of Grenouille's will to power originates in his sense of lack that was established at birth, when his mother discarded him as refuse. Unwanted and unloved, Grenouille in his quest for power thrives on his malevolent misogyny, but it is Grenouille's desire to be accepted and loved by everyone that greatly motivates his drive for power. Süskind satirizes economies of power, and male dominance in particular, not only by highlighting the illusory nature of power, but also by positing Grenouille as a man entirely obsessed with the bodies of women. Grenouille repudiates his own desires and weaknesses yet reenacts his Oedipal anxieties over his desire to be loved by his mother by murdering women on the cusp of sexual maturity. When he was rejected and discarded by his mother as refuse, this initiated an anxiety and anger in him, which he eventually projects onto the virginal women whom he attacks. His female victims, who possess beauty and sexual purity, are set in opposition to his mother's sexual fecundity and represent his deep desire for love, something his mother never gave him. The sexual nature of Grenouille's attacks on women involves him taking "their essence" and nothing more; however, within a narrative that depicts Grenouille as a collector of women, and in the sadistic pleasure he receives from collecting scents, it is impossible to ignore the symbolic sexual violence that is part of his ambitious drive to power. By reading Grenouille as a violator figure – a rapist – it is possible to situate his depravity in a psychology of phallocratic power, where the characteristics of masculine entitlement, ambition and desire are inflamed by violence against women.

The origins of Grenouille's gifted yet perverse sense of smell can be traced to the moment of his birth. In the "most putrid spot in the whole kingdom" (4), a fish stall located adjacent to a graveyard, Grenouille's mother gives birth. The narrator describes the abject conditions of Grenouille's birth in detail:

She only wanted the pain to stop, she wanted to put this revolting birth behind her as quickly as possible. It was her fifth. She had effected all the others here at the fish booth, and all had been stillbirths or semi-stillbirths, for the bloody meat that emerged had not differed greatly from the fish guts that lay there already, nor had

lived much longer, and by evening the whole mess had been shoveled away and carted off to the graveyard or down to the river. (5)

The grotesque imagery of discarded human remains mingled together with fish guts captures the inhumanity of the culture as well as the abject conditions that produce such careless disregard for human life. The fecundity of Grenouille's mother is couched in misogynistic descriptions of fish flesh and disease. She suffers from "gout and syphilis and a touch of consumption" (5); yet it is not these physical afflictions that convey her monstrosity, but rather her cold indifference to life. She hopes one day to "bear *real* children" (emphasis added) and to improve her lot in life by marrying a "widower with a trade" (5); but at this time, she cannot care less about her newborn, who blocks her aspirations towards a financially viable marriage. Instead, she just "squatted down under the gutting table and there gave birth, as she had done four times before, and cut the newborn thing's umbilical cord with her butcher knife" (5). That she regards her newborn as a "thing" makes it obvious that his life is not valued; indeed, she does not see him as human at all. This image of motherhood alludes to the "bad," "phallic" or "castrating mother" figure theorized by psychoanalysts.<sup>15</sup> The fact that Grenouille's mother wields a butcher knife reinforces her role as the castrating mother in toto. This characterization of Grenouille's mother identifies how defenses against castration anxieties are central to all of Grenouille's subsequent sadistic impulses and misogynistic actions.

Reduced to a "thing," Grenouille is unwanted and would have died if not for his "instinctive cry" through which he notifies others of his presence (21). Grenouille's mother is then charged with multiple counts of infanticide and sentenced to death. Her

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<sup>15</sup> The works of Freud, Jung, and Klein among others have described the psychological fear of the "bad" or "castrating" mother figure. Freud discusses how the child fears his mother or some other female figure will threaten him "with having his penis or his sinful hand cut off" ("The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms" 416). In Jungian psychology, the "puer aeternus" represents an archetypal "boy-man" who is "symbolically castrated by a symbiotic, infantilizing mother" (Teitelbaum 128). Klein went further by locating infantile sexual development in relation to the mother's body. In Kleinian theory, the male child projects its fears and anxieties onto the mother's body. For a boy, the "bad" mother threatens castration by being imagined as in possession of the phallus (M. Klein 436).

death begins a pattern repeated throughout the narrative, in which individuals who exploit and abuse Grenouille end up dying in retribution for their cruelty through fateful or supernatural turns of events. The repetition of abuse and exploitation for material gain creates an aura of sickness and perversion, a specter of death that follows Grenouille throughout his life. As shown in his birth scene, Grenouille's moral sickness is intimately tied to his destructive, "castrating" mother and the deplorable social conditions of poverty and misogyny that contribute to her murderous actions. Grenouille's subsequent malevolent ambitions to dominate and, in his own perverse way, to force others to love him are connected with both his mother's and society's repudiation of his newborn self. These are the traumatic origins of Grenouille's psychopathology and contribute to his subsequent criminal violence.

In her reading of Grenouille's birth, Teresa Ludden has suggested that Süskind's portrayal of motherhood is both monstrous and misogynistic. The depiction of birth is characterized by "extreme misogynistic ideas about women and the mother" (346). She goes on to suggest that the overall impression one gets from this scene is "the mother, and birth itself, are purely monstrous" and "a pure figment of the male imagination" (346). Along with the monstrous representation of female fecundity, there is also a rendering of the abject. Grenouille's birth amid the stench of corpses and the entrails of fish is a reminder of the mutable border between life and death, man and animal, and also between the newborn as a subject apart from, yet still intimately joined with, a threatening (m)Other. When Grenouille is born amid refuse, he is saved from an imminent death by his own will to live. As the narrator describes, "the cry that followed his birth, the cry with which he had brought himself to people's attention and his mother to the gallows, was not an instinctive cry for sympathy and love. That cry, emitted upon careful consideration, one might even say upon mature consideration, was the newborn's decision *against* love and nevertheless for life" (Süskind 21). In the narrator's estimation, Grenouille possesses maturity even from this early stage of life. Whether or not the narrator's voice is reliable in this regard has been questioned by critics like Dieter Stolz, who argues that the narrator's unreliability throughout the text provides one more example of how "claims of authenticity and truth are consistently taken ad absurdum" (26), where the tale itself becomes yet another "art of manipulation" (28). The narrator's

claims to omniscience and mastery of language cannot be fully separated from the discourses of power that appear throughout. Rather, the narrator seems to confirm how these discourses organize and shape our perceptions.

By providing an omniscient view of Grenouille's intentions at the moment of his birth, the narrator suggests that from the beginning of life, Grenouille is endowed with a "calculated, egocentric" impulse (Gray 242). The intention of this "egocentric" impulse is matricide. Grenouille's cry at this moment has two direct results: "the possibility of [his] self-preservation and . . . the death of another human being" (Gray 242). By choosing to assert himself in this moment through his cry, Grenouille causes his mother's death, instigating his separation-individuation from his castrating mother. From this moment of self-assertion, Grenouille will mature into a man driven by the need for power. It is his first murder and the defining moment of his entire existence. Yet to survive this traumatic moment, Grenouille has to do without "[s]ecurity, attention, tenderness, love . . . all those things . . . that children are said to require" (21). From the very start of his life, he has "dispensed" of these basic human needs, "just to go on living" (21). Deprived of affection and kindness, Grenouille's only joys in life are derived from the world of scent.

The correlation between Grenouille's individuation, his will to dominate, and his murder of his mother can also be seen in relation to a psychoanalytic myth of historical change. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud identifies the transition from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society with the simultaneous devaluation of an olfactory sexuality and promotion of a visual sexuality (Owens 60). As Freud argues in *Civilization and Its Discontents*,

the diminution in importance of olfactory stimuli seems . . . to be a consequence of man's erecting himself from the earth, of his adoption of an upright gait, which made his genitals, that before had been covered, visible and in need of protection and so evoked feelings of shame. Man's erect posture, therefore, would represent the beginning of the momentous process of cultural evolution. The chain of development would run from this onward, through the diminution in the importance of olfactory stimuli and the isolation of women at their periods, to a time when visual stimuli became paramount, the genitals became visible, further till sexual excitation became constant and the family was founded, and so to the

threshold of human culture. (99)

The shift from olfactory to visual sexuality marks a shift away from the mother's body as primarily olfactory, as the centre of sexuality, to the phallus as the most visible sign of arousal and sexual difference (Owens 60). In Süskind's text, Grenouille is clearly meant to reflect this more "primitive" social and sexual order, with his appearance as "small [and] hunchbacked" (239) and his insatiable arousal by the impending onset of sexual maturation and menstruation as the criterion for his selection of young female victims.

According Julia Kristeva, the process of cultural evolution towards civilization is founded on abjection of the "unclean and improper" body, including the repudiation of the "secretion or discharge, anything that leaks out of the feminine or masculine body" (102). Urine, blood, sperm and excrement, the discharges of the human body, are aligned with the olfactory sense and the "uncivilized" order of humanity. Within a patriarchal order, parturition and menstruation link the female (maternal) body to abjection. The strong odours and substances expelled from the body are abjected as sources of shame and contempt within a patriarchal society. Yet there is always a threat of defilement and contamination returning to disturb the careful construction of "civilization." Grenouille becomes this threat, as he represents the abjected olfactory sensuality of the female (maternal) body as locus of sexual desire.

Grenouille's matricide can be viewed, in this context, as part of the cultural abjection of the mother's power and denial of dependence on the body of the woman-mother. On the level of the individual, the movement of the subject into the symbolic order of language marks this definitive break away from the maternal body. This transition into a symbolic order is conveyed by Grenouille's mission in life to organize scents in a "catalog" ( 44) or "vocabulary of odors" (26), in accordance with the scientific reasoning of the period, which strove to order and categorize the natural world; in this way, Grenouille creates his own symbolic order, but of scents rather than linguistic signifiers. In his mind, if he could master this symbolic order, he would be able to rule the world. As in a patriarchal social order, which according to Lacan privileges the phallus as the "master signifier" (Spivak lxv), Grenouille organizes his social order around a "master scent" (Süskind 43). Grenouille's order of scent is described through a metaphor of language: "It was as if he were an autodidact possessed of a huge vocabulary

of odors that enabled him to form at will great numbers of smelled sentences” (26). While Grenouille struggles with actual language, he excels at the creative enterprise of arranging and ordering scents, which functions as a form of self-expression and his chief source of pleasure. Unwinding threads of scent down to their most simplified units gives Grenouille an “unspeakable joy” (34); this joy can be interpreted as coming from his mastery of the symbolic order of scent, a mastery that becomes his “‘language’ of control” (Gray 238).

The repression of the female body in patriarchal order is represented by Grenouille’s possession of a “master scent” (43), which he derives from the premenstrual body of a thirteen-year-old girl. Grenouille is rendered powerless by the intoxicating scent of the girl: “It was more the premonition of a scent than the scent itself . . . He was almost sick with excitement” (38-39). Grenouille is not only “sick” but “helpless” (39) against the power of this scent: “[He] walked with no will of his own. . . . [He] moved along the passage like a somnambulist” towards the source of the smell (40). Notably, the girl smells unlike other women, who are described as smelling like “rancid fat and rotting fish” (41): smells that are reminiscent of the mother in her misogynistic portrayal. This young girl’s scent was “so rich, so balanced, so magical, that every perfume that Grenouille had smelled until now, every edifice of odors that he had so playfully created within himself, seemed at once to be utterly meaningless” (41). This girl’s scent becomes the Ideal without which all other scents become “meaningless.” As the narrator describes, “this one scent was the higher principle, the pattern by which the others must be ordered. It was pure beauty” (42) and thereby the aim of pure desire. This description of the girl’s scent situates the essence of her body as the master signifier or, in Lacanian terms, “the Phallus.” Because the Phallus, as Lacan theorized it, signifies something that the subject, male or female, lacks, it stands in as desire of the Other (288). By locating the source of Grenouille’s higher principle in a female essence, Süskind illustrates the patriarchal construction of desire, wherein the “Phallus” is the locus of desire and mastery.

Sickened by excitement, Grenouille is determined to possess the scent that he lacks: “his whole life would be bungled, if he, Grenouille, did not succeed in possessing it. He had to have it, not simply in order to possess it, but for his heart to be at peace” (38). This state of excessive desire reflects a state of castration or lack within himself that

he needs to fill by possessing this ideal female essence. Indeed, Grenouille's entire self-worth is locked up in desire for possession: "Grenouille knew for certain that unless he possessed this scent, his life would have no meaning" (42). Driven into a sick fervour of scent ecstasy, Grenouille murders the girl just so he can take in her scent without resistance. In an act evoking rape, Grenouille takes the girl's scent or essence: "When she was dead he laid her on the ground . . . , tore off her dress, and the stream of scent became a flood that inundated him with its fragrance. He thrust his face to her skin and swept his flared nostrils across her . . . he was brimful with her" (43). Just as in an earlier passage, when Grenouille's manner of absorbing scent is described, this moment illustrates how he does not passively smell, but violently "impregnat[es] himself through his innermost pores" with the scent (24). Yet this metaphor of impregnation used to describe Grenouille's rape of the girl's scent also puts him in a feminized position. He is paradoxically both a masculinized subject perpetrating violence and a feminized object passively impregnated with scent. The sexual imagery of female fertility and impregnation illuminates how Grenouille is not solely a murderer, but a man who parasitically absorbs from women the powers he desires.

The motifs of sexual gratification, impregnation, and birth are reiterated in the following passage, when the girl's death marks the moment of Grenouille's rebirth as a creative genius:

Never before in his life had he known what happiness was. . . . Now he was quivering with happiness and could not sleep for pure bliss. It was as if he had been born a second time, the first time, for until now he had merely existed like an animal. . . . But after today, he felt as if he finally knew who he really was: nothing less than a genius. And that the meaning and goal and purpose of his life had a higher destiny: nothing less than to revolutionize the odiferous world. (43)

The image of Grenouille "quivering" in "pure bliss" reinforces the sexual nature of his violence, yet the description of his pleasure is stereotypically feminine; it is almost as if he was the one being "deflowered" as he seduced by scent for "the first time" (43). The motif of "deflowering" virgins is repeated throughout the novel, culminating in the "harvesting" of twenty-five girls. The narrator even refers to one of Grenouille's female victims as the "green [bud] of flowers before [it] blossom[s]" (171). This killing of girls

for their scent is fitting in a social order that objectifies women, valuing them solely for their sexuality or as commodities in a masculine economy of power.

The fact that Grenouille collects the scents of virgins can be interpreted as a consequence of his primal repression of his castrating mother. His mother, a woman who experienced multiple pregnancies, each resulting in still-birth or miscarriage, was promiscuous and fecund. The value that Grenouille places on female purity reflects his personal fascination with the clean and proper female body. Notably, the victims harvested for their perfume are not only virgins, but also virginal girls who have not yet begun to menstruate; this, in turn, is reinforced by the red colour of his victims' hair. Nonetheless, as girls, rather than women, the victims embody an innocence and promise of beauty that is not yet abjectly sexual. Grenouille idealizes his female victims as aesthetic objects whom he can use to further his art, killing them before they become reproductive women like his mother. This splitting of a "good" femininity from a "bad" femininity is rooted in male castration anxieties.

In the psychoanalytic theory of Melanie Klein, splitting is enacted during the paranoid-schizoid position in infantile development, in which the child divides the maternal object into "good" and "bad" (Mitchell 20). According to Peter Lock, "anxiety leads to splitting of the object," where the "terrifying and persecutory objects and figures are relegated to the deepest layers of the unconscious" (18). For Grenouille, his mother occupies this position as she is both "terrifying and persecutory" in her disregard of Grenouille at birth. Within the paranoid-schizoid stage of development, the subject is also characterized as using fantasy or "excessive idealization" as an " 'omnipotent' attempt to deny the existence of what is felt to be threatening, fragmenting or mutilating" (Lock 19). Grenouille's idealization of virgins seems to serve this purpose, providing him with a fantasy of ideal femininity that counters his latent fears of his castrating mother. Paranoid-schizoid and derived from castration anxiety, Grenouille's "genius" and ambition for power illustrate the hierarchical structures of patriarchal power, locating its real motivation in fear of the (m)Other.

The connection between Grenouille's quest for power and his traumatic early childhood becomes clear when he begins his apprenticeship with the master perfumer, Giuseppe Baldini. Baldini observes Grenouille's appearance and personality, noting how



he looks like a child, despite his ungainly hands, despite his scarred, pockmarked face and his bulbous old-man's nose. . . . [He] looks just like one of those unapproachable, incomprehensible, willful little prehuman creatures, who in their ostensible innocence think only of themselves, who want to subordinate the whole world to their despotic will, and would do it, too, if one let them pursue their megalomaniacal ways . . . There was just such a fanatical child trapped inside this young man . . . (81)

Even at this point in his life, when Grenouille is a "young man," his psyche is still caught up in the infantile aggressive urges and sadistic impulses that Klein described in her theories of psychic development. By referring to Grenouille as a "fanatical child," the narrator refers to his psychological disposition in order to identify the latent motivations of his malevolence. This description of Grenouille's willful ambition for world domination diminishes the masculine quest for power by contextualizing it in the anxieties and psychosis of infantile development.

Before Grenouille embarks on his quest for world domination, for seven years he removes himself from all human contact to live in complete isolation in a mountain cave. Grenouille's seclusion in the cave alludes to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, where the isolated Prospero bides his time, waiting to return to society, and to Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where the monster, isolated from and shunned by the rest of society, hides in a cave. It also connotes the biblical story of God's creation of the world in seven days. This period of Grenouille's metamorphosis corresponds with the Seven Years' War that "ragged in the world outside" (Süskind 132). During this period, France lost its "colonial empire" while Grenouille cocooned himself in isolation, developing his own plan to bring his "self-made empire" into fruition (132). Reminiscent of Superman's "fortress of solitude," Grenouille's cave dwelling provides a sanctuary from the human world. In this cave, Grenouille incubates in isolation while creating an alter ego of super-human proportions, a Nietzschean Übermensch. Indeed, Grenouille can be viewed as what Roger Horrocks calls a "dark Superman" figure (126) in that, like Superman, he possesses supernatural powers in his sense of smell, is split into two identities, and assumes an idealized version of masculinity as his alter ego. Horrocks identifies an archetypal masculine myth in the Clark Kent / Superman divide that figures masculine subjectivity

in binary terms: impotent / phallic, weak / strong, feminine / masculine, impotent / omnipotent (145). For Grenouille, this division of identity is implied in the construction of his fantastic alter ego, “Grenouille the Great” (126), the persona that he uses to dominate and control others.

While in the solitude of his cave, Grenouille imagines himself the ruler of an empire: “Created and ruled over by him, the incomparable Grenouille, laid waste by him if he so chose and then raised up again, made boundless by him and defended with a flaming sword against every intruder” (126). Notably, the “flaming sword”<sup>16</sup> in Grenouille’s fantasy can be seen as an extension of this godlike, Phallic persona. The club he uses to murder the young women, later in the novel, also symbolizes his violent and violating phallic potency. And yet Grenouille’s grand vision for himself is not solely destructive, but also creative; he takes on “the double role of avenger and creator of worlds” (127). Grenouille envisions a new world, once the “stench of the past had been swept away” (126). In this fantasy, he creates an alternate world of fragrance that is engendered when “the whole earth [is] saturated with his divine Grenouille seeds” (126). The fertile imagery of his fantasy represents a dissemination of phallic power as well as an appropriation of feminine fertility. He is both mother and father in this scene, where he both fertilizes and gives birth to a new world order.

Critics like Nicholas Vazsonyi and Stuart Parkes have interpreted Grenouille as a Promethean figure derivative of Romantic notions of the artist / genius. The image of Grenouille’s artistic genius, his quest to perfect his art, and the notion that “genius is a divine gift spurred into action by life’s circumstances: a combination of nature and nurture” all seem to support this Romantic vision of idealized artist (Vazsonyi 345). However, as Vanzsonyi argues in his comparison between Grenouille and Hitler (343), the novel contains a critique of the artist / genius in that Grenouille’s ambitious creativity is also an exercise of power. Through his perfume, Grenouille wants “to control people for his own sinister purposes” (343); in this way, his creative artistry cannot be viewed as

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<sup>16</sup> The flaming sword is also an allusion to Genesis 3:24: “So he drove out the man: and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (*The Holy Bible*, King James Version).

separate from his evil, destructive impulses and his sadistic appropriation of (female) creativity.

The sadism of Grenouille's quest for power is reinforced in the image of Grenouille gratifying himself through fantasies of destruction. Notably, Grenouille takes the time to conjure up the fragrance memories of his past, including "the homicidal odor of his mother" (124). This sense memory allows his "pent-up hate" to "erupt with orgasmic force – that was, after all, the point of the exercise. . . . Grenouille, the little man, quivered with excitement, his body writhed with voluptuous delight and arched so high that he slammed his head against the roof of the tunnel, only to sink back slowly and lie there lolling in satiation" (124-25). In this instance, the onanistic act of pleasuring himself with the fantasized creation and destruction of offensive odors places his quest for power clearly in a psychosexual context. When alone in this cave, Grenouille gives full expression to the transgressive Oedipal urges that fuel his misanthropy as he conjures the scent of his mother solely for the purpose of destroying her again.

Indeed, the cavernous tunnel in which Grenouille spends these seven years alone can be seen as a symbolic representation of both his unconscious mind and the womb. The "twists and turns" of this "natural tunnel leading back into the mountain" make it a place reminiscent of a womb. When in the "pitch-black" cave that is "deathly quiet," Grenouille "curl[s] up" (122) and is "overcome by a sense of something like sacred awe" (122). This womb-like environment is both cold and deathly, yet it is where Grenouille feels a sense of comfort and security. In this way, his symbolic return to the womb is reminiscent of Freud's death drive, hypothesized as "the most universal endeavour of all living substance – namely to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 37). Grenouille's emotional response to the security and comfort of the cave draws from the contrasting image of his castrating mother: "Never in his life had he felt so secure, certainly not in his mother's belly" (122). This period of solitude becomes a second gestation, one derived solely from his own volition. In other words, it is a period of auto-genesis, wherein Grenouille gives birth to the fantasy self that will bring his ambitions to life.

However, Grenouille's self-birth as his phallic persona "Grenouille the Great" is frustrated by a realization that he has no odor of his own. The fact that Grenouille was

born without an odor indicates his innate inadequacy. The realization is frightening: “he gave a scream as dreadful and loud as if he were being burned alive. . . . He was deathly afraid, his whole body shook with the raw fear of death” (134). This realization of one more form of lack mimics his birth, as it precipitates the “catastrophe” that “vomit[s] him back out into the world” (133). Grenouille’s deathly fear occurs in this moment when he recognizes his own castration, that is, his lack of a self-defining scent. In this lack of scent Grenouille is inadequate before the patriarchal ideology of male subjects as either closer to or in possession of the Phallus. In her discussion of masculinity, Kaja Silverman describes how “castration or loss . . . is covered over at the level of the imaginary” (22). As for Grenouille, this make-believe occurs in his use of perfume, which he begins to wear from this point on as a disguise, hiding the fact that his subjectivity is inherently marred by lack.

Grenouille’s transformation into his Phallic ideal is achieved through the veil of scent, which allows him to deceive, manipulate, and influence those around him. But before he is able to accomplish his ambition for power, Grenouille must first learn how to adopt the guise of an ordinary man. When he first emerges from his cave, Grenouille’s appearance is anything but ordinary. He is more animal than man, given the years of living in abject squalor: “Others said he was not really a human being, but some mixture of man and bear, some kind of forest creature” (138). In this monstrous condition, Grenouille is then taken on as a subject of scientific inquiry by the Marquis de La Taillade-Espinasse, a man determined to prove his scientific theories about destructive earthly gases, despite a lack of evidence. Grenouille is paid to perform the symptoms requested by Taillade-Espinasse in confirmation of his scientific theory that “the earth itself constantly emits a corrupting gas, a so-called *fluidum letale*, which lames vital energies and sooner or later totally extinguishes them” (139-40). In front of a crowd of spectators, Grenouille feigns sickness: “he kept strictly to the instructions the marquis had given him beforehand and answered all the questions with nothing more than a strained death rattle, making helpless gestures with his hands to his larynx” (142). This masquerade is continued when five days later, Grenouille is “miraculously” cured by the Marquis’s experimental techniques. The Marquis transforms Grenouille’s “sickness” with

solely the application of new clothes, make-up, and the Marquis's own violet perfume (143).

In the theatricality of the Marquis's demonstration of his scientific theory, there is a reference to Charcot's theatrical demonstrations of hysteria patients at the Salpêtrière. Critics of Charcot accused him of exploiting his hysterical patients and coaxing them to exaggerate their symptoms for the crowd of spectators (Plucker). Like Charcot, the Marquis is an "enlightened" man, driven by ambition and innovations in scientific reason but also caught up with the performance of his theories, not disturbed by the immorality of exploitation. Notably, in this scenario, it is Grenouille who is positioned as the hysteria patient. Like the hysteric's, Grenouille's psychopathology can also be seen as a combination of psychological and physical symptoms derived from sexual confusion and a primary trauma: in his case, his traumatic birth.

However, the most explicit hysterical quality in Grenouille is his adoption of a gendered persona. In its performative aspect, Grenouille's transformation from sickness to health parallels his transformation from social marginalization to social acceptance. As Grenouille considers upon first looking at his newly coiffed appearance, "he knew that it had not been . . . hocus-pocus that had made a normal person out of him, but solely these few clothes, the haircut, and the little masquerade with cosmetics" (145). With these few alterations of his appearance, Grenouille is transformed and wears the guise of normality: "in short, he looked like a thousand other people" (144). The seemingly ordinary quality of Grenouille's disguise can be viewed from the perspective of gender performance. Instead of viewing gender identity as a fixed attribute, Judith Butler views identity as "a fluid variable which shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times" (*Gender Trouble* 25). In this way, Butler views gender as a "stylization of the body . . . that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (44). Grenouille's ability to become an ordinary male through a masquerade situates identity as a construct. As Grenouille vividly illustrates through the "fluid variable" of perfume, make-up and gendered clothing, identity itself is performative and his performance is the source of his social power.

Having achieved the appearance of an ordinary man, Grenouille desires to go one step further and enhance his manipulation of those around him by constructing a more

effective and more fluid disguise through the use of perfume. Before his social debut in front of an audience, Grenouille fakes a hysterical seizure “in highly dramatic fashion” (146) in order to get the Marquis to agree that he needs a new perfume, one that he can design himself. Grenouille’s intention with this ruse is to create “the scent of humanness” (148) that will allow him to pass into society, indistinguishable from everybody else. By concocting a mixture of “cat shit . . . cheese . . . a rancid, fishy something-or-other . . . rotten egg . . . ammonia, nutmeg, horn shavings, and singed pork rind” (150), Grenouille is able to produce a replica of human scent that will allow him to pass seamlessly into the rest of society; the list is also a graphic reminder of our and particularly his abject origins, as he is born among refuse and the smell of rotting fish.

This human perfume provides Grenouille with anonymity and acceptance within society, giving him a sense of power: “Grenouille sensed and saw with his own eyes . . . a new powerful sense of pride washed over him – that he exerted an effect on people” (152). This ability to exert an effect on others is Grenouille’s first taste of the power that will allow him to “create a scent that was not merely human, but superhuman, an angel’s scent, so indescribably good and vital that whoever smelled it would be enchanted and with his whole heart would have to love him” (154-55). It is at this moment that Grenouille perceives that he has the ability to transform himself into “the omnipotent god of scent” and attain his ambition (155). While his quest for power can be seen in the context of his intense malevolence and misanthropy, the suggestion that he requires not just obedience but the love of others speaks for a deeper psychological need and provides an element of pathos.

Thus, the desire to be loved appears as a motivation for Grenouille’s ambitions and manipulations. He is able to trick others into loving him and believing anything he says: “In essence, he could tell people whatever he wanted. Once they had gained confidence in him – and with the first breath, they gained confidence in him, for they were inhaling his artificial odor – they believed everything” (160). By manipulating their sense of smell, Grenouille is able to gain power over others, to appropriate a lovability from others that he does not experience until this point in his life. As the narrator clearly states, “what [Grenouille] coveted was the odor of *certain* human beings: that is, those rare humans who inspire love. These were his victims” (188). By positing a desire to be

loved as the core of his character, the novel reveals Grenouille's psychological lack or castration as the motivation for his ruthless quest for power.

Gender becomes a determinant of this desire for power and love when Grenouille discovers that the scent he needs to possess can only be derived from the body of a beautiful young girl named Laure Richis. Grenouille's sense of entitlement to her scent can be seen as tied to the patriarchal economy in which the girl who will become Grenouille's "muse" is valued as a commodity. Laure's desirability as a bride derives from her position as an object of exchange between her father and the "rich, fat old men [who] will skid about on their knees begging her father for her hand" (171-72). Laure's father seeks to marry off his daughter to a "man of rank" so that he can ensure "his own posterity on a track leading directly to the highest social and political influence" (199). Richis's ambitions are dependent on his daughter Laure, who is "the keystone in the edifice of his, of Richis's, own plans" (205). Unfortunately for Richis, Laure is also the "keystone" in Grenouille's ambitions. Both men seek to exploit Laure for their own gain. In this way, Grenouille's depraved quest for power is aligned with the pursuits of the patriarchs of society. Indeed, Richis and Grenouille battle for possession of Laure's virginity at the "level of a business rivalry" (205). Laure's value as a commodity of exchange is based solely on the condition that her virginity is intact: "A married woman, deflowered and if possible already pregnant, would no longer fit into [Grenouille's] exclusive gallery. . . . Laure would have lost all value for the murderer, his enterprise would have failed" (208-209). For Grenouille, virginity is the difference between "good" femininity and "bad" femininity, the stereotypical virgin / whore dichotomy on which the marriage economy has depended. This binary construction of femininity is satirized in Grenouille's violent appropriation of scent. The fact that his power is derived from Laure's scent, plus the supplemental aromas of twenty-four other virginal girls whom he has murdered and robbed of their essence, suggests that within this economy, men achieve power directly through the exploitation and traffic of women (210).

Once Grenouille masters the skill of collecting and distilling scents from his victims, he stops at nothing to possess Laure's essence. His desire "to peel [her scent] from her like skin and to make her scent his own" (172) is a gruesome and abhorrent vision, yet it captures the self-serving sense of entitlement that characterizes Grenouille's

pursuit. When he finally achieves his mission and murders Laure, much to her father's horror and the shock of the townspeople, Grenouille feels as if he "had done his best. He had employed all his artistic skill. . . . His performance had been unique. It would be crowned with success. . . . It filled him with profound satisfaction . . . He had never felt so fine in all his life, so peaceful, so steady, so whole and at one with himself" (218). This is an illusory "wholeness" and unity of self that allows Grenouille to feel as if he has overcome his sense of castration. Indeed, at the height of Grenouille's power, once he wears his master scent he appears "to the men as their ideal image of themselves" (238): the Phallus par excellence. In this way, he is finally able to possess the "Phallus," yet it is after a lengthy process of manipulation, exploitation, and murder of twenty-five girls.

The culmination of Grenouille's transformation into a god-like figure occurs after he is arrested and sentenced to death by execution. Grenouille's execution becomes a spectacle for the villagers and is clearly meant to invoke an image of Jesus' crucifixion, as Grenouille is "bound to a wooden cross, his face toward heaven, and while still alive . . . dealt twelve blows with an iron rod" (229). The religious imagery is repeated when Grenouille rises miraculously from out of his condemnation as a criminal and murderer to take on an almost angelic aura once he applies his master scent. Grenouille is able to trick the townspeople into seeing him as innocent once he applies the perfume. The entire crowd of people who once eagerly awaited his persecution and death are instantly convinced that "the man who stood at the scaffold was innocence personified" (236). Not only is Grenouille transformed in their eyes, he is able to wield a godly omnipotence over the townspeople:

The ten thousand men and women, children and patriarchs assembled there felt no different – they grew weak as young maidens who have succumbed to the charms of a lover. They were overcome by a powerful sense of goodwill, of tenderness, of crazy, childish infatuation . . . of love for this little homicidal man, and they were unable, unwilling to do anything about it. (236)

Their awe and reverence for the godlike figure builds to a Dionysian peak, leading to a sexual orgy inspired by Grenouille's irresistible scent: "Those who at the start had merely felt sympathy and compassion were now filled with naked, insatiable desire . . . driven to ecstasy" (238). There is a veritable breakdown of social order as established laws, truths,



and ideas are replaced with “sweating lust . . . loud cries, grunts, moans from ten thousand human beasts” (239). In this satirical treatment of the mob mentality, the narrator reveals how easily people are diverted from the established order. Abject carnality replaces social constraints.

Witnessing this scene that he has incited, Grenouille does not feel empowered; on the contrary, at this moment of his “greatest triumph . . . he was terrified” (240). Specifically, Grenouille is horrified at the artificiality of his god-like spectacle. In this instance, Grenouille knows in his heart that his admirers “perceived only his counterfeit aura, his fragrant disguise, his stolen perfume” (241), and it this scent, not him, that they love and worship. Grenouille’s realization of the hollowness of his façade drives him towards self-destruction. But the unthinkable occurs, as the father of Grenouille’s victim, seduced by the perfume, comes to his aid and brings Grenouille into his home, where he asks Grenouille if he will become his adopted son (243). At this moment, Grenouille is presented with the family and the father that he never had while growing up. Yet Richis only loves Grenouille because he wears his murdered daughter’s scent. The desire for love has motivated Grenouille’s entire pursuit for power, but when he finally achieves this goal, it is illusory, tainted by the falseness of his identity. Grenouille’s ascent to the heights of phallic power is ruined, as his imaginary self falls to pieces.

Grenouille’s fall from power is not complete until every trace of his existence is erased from history. As the narrator states early on, Grenouille’s history has been forgotten “because his gifts and his sole ambition were restricted to a domain that leaves no traces in history: to the fleeting realm of scent” (3). In his exclusion from history, Grenouille represents the abject, paradoxically embodying the latent urges, drives, and perversions of the normative masculine subjectivity that writes history. Through matricide, misogyny and the illusion of dominance, Grenouille embodies an ideal of male omnipotence. Yet buried deep within him is an innate vulnerability that has marred his rise to power. With love, adoration, and power at his fingertips, Grenouille still cannot overcome his feeling of lack: “There was only one thing that power could not do: it could not make him able to smell himself. And though his perfume might allow him to appear before the world as a god – if he could not smell himself and thus never know who he was, to hell with it, with the world, with himself, with his perfume” (252). Unable to

know himself and claim an authentic identity, Grenouille loses the will to live. He returns to Paris and to the site of his birth, the “garbage dump of death” where his monstrosity was born (253).

In this return to his birthplace, Grenouille enacts the death drive, a desired return to a state preceding birth (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). From a Freudian perspective, Grenouille’s desire to destroy himself in this moment is also a repetition of his birth trauma and abjection. Grenouille enters the graveyard, which at night is populated by “all sorts of riffraff: thieves, murderers, cutthroats, whores, deserters, young desperadoes” (253). These marginalized, immoral members of society, people who are similar to him in their depravity, are then incited to a murderous frenzy when Grenouille “sprinkled himself all over” with his master scent (254). The townpeoples’ rapture is also experienced here, except the uninhibited desire of this “riffraff” turns to violence. These degenerates bring out knives, axes and cleavers to attack Grenouille: “[He] was divided into thirty pieces, and every animal in the pack snatched a piece for himself, and then, driven by voluptuous lust, dropped back to devour it” (255). In this brutal display of cannibalistic blood lust, the narrator satirically suggests the abject origins of civilization and the innate monstrosity buried in human nature and disavowed by the normative patriarchal social order.<sup>17</sup> The lust-filled consumption of Grenouille’s body is retribution for his own crimes of passion enacted against his female victims’ bodies. Notably, the narrator describes a “delicate, virginal glow of happiness” on the faces of the “riff raff” who devour Grenouille’s body, as well as suggesting that they have done it “out of love” (255). The reiteration of the girls’ “virginal” quality in the cannibals reinforces the punishment of Grenouille’s actions, conveying how he is ultimately consumed by his victims and hence his own desire for power. The cutting to pieces and consumption of Grenouille’s body also reinforces Süskind’s critique of power and mastery, as “Grenouille the Great,” a dictator, is reduced to an object, mutilated –

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<sup>17</sup> In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud describes how anti-social aggression, “an original self-subsisting disposition in man . . . constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization” (118). For civilization to develop, this destructive instinct must be suppressed.

“castrated” – and devoured until there is nothing left of him, an abject death at the hands of an unruly mob. One cannot help but recall the similar circumstances of Mussolini’s death, when he was shot and his corpse assaulted, hung on meat hooks and stoned by civilians (“Death in Milan”).

Grenouille’s life is framed by abjection, demonstrating the human condition as one that cannot fully transcend its corporeality, in spite of ambitions to rise above it. The narration of Grenouille’s life from birth to death follows a *Künstlerroman* structure to trace the origins and life experiences of an abominable artist, yet his narrative is more than a fictional biography. By creating the narrative of a miserable, misanthropic, murderous little man, Süskind has also undermined the heroic ideal of masculinity. Over the course of the novel, Grenouille is able to achieve the height of masculine virtues: he is all-powerful and masterful in his chosen ambitions. Yet, in the end, this ideal collapses as Grenouille succumbs to his own self-defeating lie: that he is in possession of what he lacks. In this way, scent is a metaphor for the void at the heart of Grenouille’s subjectivity. Grenouille’s drive to power exposes the cultural imperatives of a patriarchal society that denies its own vulnerability and lack. In this way, one man’s monstrosity embodies the violent impulses that are repressed from history and civilization.

## Chapter Two

### Rape and Revenge in Graphic Detail: Neil Gaiman's "Calliope" in *The Sandman* Comic Series

As a creation "penned" by man, moreover, woman has been "penned up" or "penned in." As a sort of "sentence" man has spoken, she has herself been "sentenced": fated, jailed, for he has both "indited" her and "indicted" her.

(Sandra Gilbert, *Literary Paternity* 492)

It is true, and very much to the point, that women are objects, commodities, some deemed more expensive than others – but it is only by asserting one's humanness every time, in all situations, that one becomes someone as opposed to something. That, after all, is the core of our struggle.

(Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* 83)

Neil Gaiman has been critically acclaimed for his contributions to graphic literature and his expansive oeuvre of children's literature, adult and young adult novels, poetry, short fiction, and screenplays. Gaiman's ability to weave fantasy, fairytales, folktales, mythology, canonical literature, and Gothic horror into his graphic medium has played a significant role in elevating graphic literature as a subject for scholarship.<sup>18</sup> In particular, Gaiman's writing draws from a rich literary tradition: he is able to incorporate seamlessly a variety of sources into his fantasy narratives. Of note is his integration of William Shakespeare as well as characters from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into *The Sandman* comic series. Gaiman's comic adaptation of Shakespeare has garnered a lot of attention from scholarly critics; it was the first comic to win The World Fantasy award

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<sup>18</sup> Scholarly approaches to Gaiman's work have addressed intertexts such as Shakespeare, folk/fairytales, the semiotics of the graphic novel (Round), hyperreality in the graphic novel (Round), narratology and genre (Vos; Walsh), and identity politics (Jódar; Sanders), as well as *The Sandman* as a postmodern text. (See Jódar for a discussion of *The Sandman* as an example of the postmodern breakdown of metanarratives.)

(Eldridge). Allusions to Greek mythology are also central to the thematic and plot sequence of *The Sandman* series, which is often recognized as Gaiman's most influential contribution to graphic literature. As an epic series, spanning seventy-five issues from 1989 to 1996, *The Sandman* tales center on the figure of Dream / Oneiros / Morpheus, the personification of the unconscious, ruler of dreams and nightmares, all that is kept hidden from waking consciousness (Hildebrandt and Morrow). In this regard, Gaiman's protagonist embodies the psychological fascination, which is evident in the Gothic tradition, with the monstrosities that dwell deep within the human psyche. Critics including Joe Sanders, Andrés Romero Jódar and David Rudd take up Gaiman's interest in the psyche and how the psyche relates to identity. Sanders and Jódar, in particular, focus on *The Sandman* series, looking at Oneiros's identity as a father figure (Sanders) and as a man divided between his sense of duty and a need to change (Jódar). Both critics also take into account how Oneiros's past experience of trauma (his forced imprisonment) has affected his relationships with others. My analysis of Oneiros and *The Sandman* will take up these questions of identity and trauma, but with a focus on gender. Indeed, it will be my aim to situate Gaiman's *The Sandman* within a feminist framework, where his storytelling is significant not only as a Gothic narrative, but also, I argue, as a powerful critique of patriarchal structures.

My analysis of Gaiman's work will focus primarily on his graphic short story "Calliope," which is included as part of *The Sandman: Dream Country*, Volume 3, illustrated by Kelley Jones and Malcolm Jones III. My approach to Gaiman's work situates his narrative within a critique of a masculine literary tradition. As part of Gaiman's extended fantasy discourse of *The Sandman* series, the story "Calliope" stands out as one of Gaiman's most overtly feminist polemics. In this story, Gaiman provides a powerful critique of patriarchal economies of power and privilege through his depiction of sexual violence. The story focuses on Calliope, the female Muse who is raped and imprisoned by two men, first Erasmus Fry and then Richard Madoc. Both writers enslave her to fulfill their selfish ambitions for fame and fortune. Both men imprison and rape Calliope as a means of gaining her creative inspiration. Sexual violence, as enacted in Calliope's repeated rape and imprisonment by both men, becomes the target of Gaiman's critical commentary on masculine ambition and entitlement. As Gaiman explores the dark

fantasy world of male ambition, he challenges the reality of exploitation and degradation of women as well as the appropriation of feminine creativity in the masculine literary tradition.

By exploring the unconscious desires of Madoc and to a lesser extent Erasmus Fry, Madoc's predecessor and literary mentor, Gaiman is able to go beneath the surface of power and control in masculine gender identity to uncover its dark side of exploitation and lack, where lack is disavowed, masculine ambition is fulfilled, and mastery is perversely attained through sexual violence. In the story, the protagonist Richard Madoc, a young man and writer struggling to follow up his successful first novel, seeks the help of Erasmus Fry, who is also a writer. Fry has already had a long and successful career as a novelist, and now as an old man faces the end of his illustrious career. Madoc becomes the successor to Fry's literary legacy when he acquires Calliope, the Muse who has fuelled Fry's creativity over the past sixty years of his writing career. Both men experience the heights of career success by exploiting Calliope's creative inspiration; however, in both cases, the men attain their success at the expense of their compassion and humanity. The rise and fall of each illustrates how it is the unrelenting ambition of each that ultimately becomes the source of his downfall, where each man's journey ends in a state of emptiness and abjection.

Gaiman draws from the legend of Faust, the tale of a male scholar who makes a pact with the devil, exchanging his soul for unlimited knowledge, power and pleasure. In the early tales of Faust, including Christopher Marlowe's version of the story in his play *Dr. Faustus*, the devil carries Faust to hell. In later versions such as Goethe's adaptation, Faust does not suffer eternal damnation but is saved by God's grace. The allusion to Faust reveals a central theme of hubris in the male author-scholar's quest for omniscient power and pleasure. Gaiman's version of this legend elaborates on this theme, by incorporating a critique of masculine entitlement and ambition in the protagonist's exploitation of a goddess. Here it is Madoc's deal with Erasmus Fry that seals his fate as he rises to heights of ultimate fame and fortune, only to be dragged down into the pit of despair once he is made accountable for his abuse of power.

Acting as the agent of Calliope's revenge, Oneiros acts within the story to take possession of Madoc's unconscious, and he effectively drives Madoc into a manic frenzy

of creativity. At the height of his psychosis, Madoc mutilates his own body, specifically the hands with which he writes, losing his self-control and his ability to separate the real world from his fantasies. Although Oneiros's role within this narrative is minimal (he appears in one scene with Madoc and in one with Calliope), his impact on Calliope's life is profound. He supports her liberation from her sexual enslavement, empathizing with her abject condition of forced imprisonment, and in the end serves justice by punishing Madoc's crime of violent exploitation. In this way, Oneiros's compassionate masculinity is set in contrast to the selfish malevolence of both Madoc and Fry, where his empathetic understanding of a female Other becomes the source of Calliope's ultimate liberation. Indeed, as exemplified in the story of "Calliope," Gaiman's work can be seen as feminist. Gaiman's *oeuvre* transforms the conventional masculine-centric genre of comic books to include a resilient and powerful feminine presence that does not alienate or demean his female readers.

Oneiros's significance as a model of masculinity is profound when viewed within the larger context of comic-book culture. When this is understood as a genre that is primarily produced by and targeted at boys or men, depictions of non-hegemonic masculinity, such as that represented by Gaiman's character Oneiros, can be seen as a significant contribution to re-shaping masculinity differently.<sup>19</sup> As Jeffrey A. Brown states, the comic book is "one of Western culture's most rudimentary and instructional forms" that provides its "young readers a model of gender behaviour" (25). For boys, comic book superheroes present a model of masculinity to which they can aspire: "For a boy, the image of Superman is an image of what he dreams of becoming" (Middleton 40). Most notably, traditional and conventional comic book superheroes are characterized by their depiction of masculinity as a "hyper-masculine ideal" (Brown 25). Critics who discuss comic book masculinity, including Brown, Peter Middleton, Richard Landon, Arthur Flannigan Saint-Aubin, and Alan Klein, consider the central motifs of masculine

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<sup>19</sup> To characterize comic books as produced for boys or adolescent males is not to say that there are not female readers or female-centered comic books. Rather, I mean to suggest that traditional comics, specifically superhero comics, are targeted at young men. Indeed many of these comics can also be seen by female readers as demeaning, alienating or exclusive.

duality and masquerade in relation to gender socialization. According to Brown, masculine identity in comic books is dichotomous: “At the one end is the hyper-masculine ideal with muscles, sex appeal, and social competence; at the other is the skinny, socially inept failure” (26). Often, these two extremes of masculinity are embodied in one superhero who transforms from a “shy, clumsy, insecure, cowardly” man to “the ideal of phallic masculinity” (31), the Clark Kent / Superman figure being the archetypal form of this masculine duality. When viewed within this generic convention, Gaiman’s figure of Oneiros stands out as a non-hegemonic model of masculinity. Physically, Oneiros differs from the hyper-masculine model, appearing pale, gaunt, and tall with unkempt, scraggly black hair. Indeed, he looks more like the average adolescent male comic book reader than the typical over-muscled superhero archetype. If conventional comic book masculinity is defined in opposition to feminine qualities, as Brown suggests it is, then in certain feminine qualities Oneiros also bears little similarity with other male comic heroes. While he is stoic and often portrayed as emotionally indifferent, over the course of the series Oneiros does begin to show compassion, as illustrated in the “Calliope” tale.

From a Freudian perspective, comic books can be viewed as a wish fulfillment for young men in particular; they represent often-unconscious desires, conflicts or anxieties (“Wish Fulfilment” 214). As Wiley Lee Umphlett affirms, “The comic book, because of its obsession with the exploration and dramatization of fantasy, is capable of plumbing the depths of both our psychic wish fulfillments and dreads as no other medium can, with the possible exception of the movies” (104). Indeed, the similarities between wish fulfillment in dreams and that in comic book narratives is conveyed in Freud’s own words:

The shutting-off of mental life from reality . . . enable[s] this wished-for instinctual satisfaction to be experienced . . . As a result of this same regression, ideas are transformed in the dream into visual pictures: the latent dream-thoughts, that is to say, are dramatized and illustrated. (“Revision of the Theory of Dreams” 19)

The similarity is in the construction of a fantasy world that dramatizes not only the dreamer-reader’s deepest desires but also the unresolved conflicts of the masculine



psyche. As Middleton expresses, “The panels of sketchily drawn figures give desires a space for fantasies of manhood which can go beyond the machinery of masculinity to its fears, angers and imperatives” (24). The conventional conflict of masculine subjectivity is the conflict between the phallic, hyper-masculine ideal and the experience of castration or inadequacy. In fulfillment of the desire to escape feelings of inadequacy, comics can offer narratives of transformation, allowing boys to aspire to the power and mastery of an ideal masculinity; yet the fantasy world of a comic also veils the loss or lack inherent in the masculine subject (Middleton 40). In Gaiman’s tale “Calliope” and within *The Sandman* series as a whole, this conflict of masculinity is imagined and dramatized repeatedly. Indeed, Gaiman’s portrayal of masculinity, within “Calliope” in particular, demonstrates in stark terms that the idealized phallic model of masculinity is not only unstable, but also inherently destructive. Even Oneiros himself, a god-like figure, dies at the conclusion of the series, proving that even “supermen” are susceptible to mortal consequences.

The patriarchal context of Gaiman’s tale is established on the first page, where there is a transaction between two men, the basic unit of exchange in a patriarchal economy of power and prestige. Men’s relationships with other men, or what Kosovsky Sedgwick refers to as “homosociality,” rely on the “the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men” (25-26). In this opening scene, Richard Madoc is shown autographing a copy of his novel for Felix Garrison, a doctor, in exchange for a “trichinobezoar” (11): a mass of undigested hair found in the stomach of a young woman and thought to have magical, healing properties. The exchange between these two men is in part an affirmation of Madoc’s status; Garrison is a fan of Madoc’s first novel, and for this reason he provides Madoc with the rare bezoar in exchange for his autograph. The fact that it is a trichinobezoar being exchanged is also noteworthy, in that the men are each benefiting from and, in a way, exploiting the body and sickness of a young woman to possess the desired byproduct of her “Rapunzel syndrome”(11).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, like Rapunzel in her

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<sup>20</sup> “Rapunzel syndrome” or trichinophagia refers to a psychological condition where the patient ingests hair, often after pulling it out from her head. Because hair cannot be

tower, Calliope, too, will be locked away where, powerless, she must wait to be rescued. Although death is rare in trichinophagia cases, the Gothic context of the story implies that Garrison has come upon this hairball in an insidious manner, either stealing it from the operating room after surgical extraction or acquiring it from the woman's body post mortem.

This exchange between men is later repeated when Madoc, now in possession of the bezoar, goes to the house of Erasmus Fry. At this point Madoc and Fry complete their transaction: the exchange of Calliope, the Muse who has been imprisoned by Fry for over sixty years, for the bezoar. Madoc and Fry cement their homosocial relation, each filling the other's void by providing him with what he needs. All the while, Calliope is demeaned in her treatment as an object of currency passed between them. This degradation of Calliope is reinforced when Fry states, "They say one ought to woo her kind, but I must say I found force most efficacious" (15). The implication is that he has repeatedly raped Calliope in order to achieve "the fame and the glory" (15) of his successful writing career and is now passing her on to Madoc, so that he may achieve similar aims by raping her.

The exchange between the two men illustrates not only the configuration of power and prestige in a patriarchal economy but also the passing on of a legacy of female degradation in pursuit of these ambitions. Gaiman's depiction of the figure of the female Muse, violated and imprisoned against her will, reinterprets the Classical Greek myths that situate the male artist figure as drawing creative inspiration from a female goddess or spirit. In the tradition of epic poetry, male writers from Virgil to Milton have drawn upon the mythic female Muse to be the divine source of their inspiration. Gaiman contextualizes his narrative within this patriarchal literary tradition when he has Fry allude to Calliope as Homer's Muse. When Fry introduces Madoc to Calliope, he states, "She was Homer's muse, so she ought to be good enough for you" (17). This patriarchal tradition of male literary genius is premised on the transaction of the female Muse between men, beginning with Homer's epic poetry, and eventually leading to the career successes of Rick Madoc.

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digested, a hairball forms in the stomach or intestines, which often must be surgically removed (Yagnik 143).

Yet as critic Philip Edward Phillips notes in his analysis of the Muse tradition, invocations of the Muse are more than just a literary convention:

In a sense, an invocation is an admission of need and incompleteness. The poet invokes the Muse to receive a “voice” outside of himself, a voice that fills the lungs or moves the pen to write inspired poetry. The invocation also establishes a relationship between poet and Muse. (8)

What Phillips identifies in this passage is that the lack or void of masculine creativity, often experienced or represented as writer’s block, is imagined as being cured by a romantic relationship between the poet and his Muse. This conflation of male literary genius with virility and, inversely, masculine “need and incompleteness” with sexual impotence is deeply rooted in literature. Feminist critics including Sandra Gilbert, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray have all taken up the problematic sexual associations of masculine literary authority and challenged the “pen as penis” metaphor dominant in Western literary traditions (Gilbert 486). Masculine literary genius has often been characterized by its phallic attributes. Feminist critics have identified this metonymic connection between the male body and literary genius as not only oppressive for female writers, but also problematic in the construction of gender identity. In *Literary Paternity*, Sandra Gilbert sees the phallic association with literary authority as excluding women from full participation in literary creation and from recognition of their work as the work of literary genius. For male writers as well, failure to live up to a standard of mastery may lead to a crisis of gender identity. As Gilbert explains, “If a woman lacks generative literary power, then a man who loses . . . such power becomes like a woman” (490); in this way, a male writer’s failures to create become a sign of his emasculation and sterility. Within this male-dominated literary culture, female subjectivity is excluded as “women exist only to be acted on by men, both as literary and as sensual object” (489). Gaiman’s narrative of Calliope provides a literal representation of this premise in the relationship between Madoc, the male author / master / possessor, and Calliope, his female Muse / slave / possession, whom he imprisons and exploits “both as literary and as sensual object.”

The sexual connotations of the poet / muse relationship are also central to understanding the gender politics of the male literary tradition. This gendering of

authorship excludes and oppresses female expression and authority through what Cixous and Irigaray refer to as “phallogocentrism.” This connection of logos or language with the Phallus suggests a deeply rooted ideological association between masculinity and a mastery of the symbolic order, where the Phallus is “the ultimate meaning of all discourse, the standard of truth and propriety, . . . the signifier and / or ultimate signifier of all desire . . . [and] emblem and agent of the patriarchal system” (Irigaray, *This Sex* 67). Phallogocentrism not only excludes women’s full participation in the symbolic order, but also defines the female subject in relation to lack (Lacan 221). Female agency in speech and sexual expression is excluded from this economy of masculine power and privilege. As Joan Cocks articulates, women are “passive receptacles for men’s active desire, . . . the receptacles for men to use and abuse” (138). Indeed, Calliope will address this form of dehumanization by proclaiming to Madoc that “I am more than a receptacle for your seed” (Gaiman, “Calliope” 28). As we will see in Gaiman’s narrative, Calliope will eventually give voice to her indignation and resist Madoc’s attempts to keep her passively imprisoned, “used and abused,” the exploited object of his drive for creativity.

Gaiman’s engagement with feminist politics centers on the Muse, her story being a potential counter-narrative to that of masculine dominance and mastery. Specifically, by representing the Muse tradition, Gaiman illuminates the vulnerability of masculine creativity and its dependence on a female Other. Gaiman challenges the conventional view of masculine mastery by illustrating the dualities of creativity and failure, strength and weakness, virility and impotence, phallus and lack, as the conflicts that characterize his male characters. As we learn early on, it is Madoc’s torturous writer’s block and his crisis of masculine identity that drive him to violate Calliope. As Steve Erickson states in his introduction to Gaiman’s story, Madoc has become “so impotent in his art . . . [that] he “enslave[s] his muse, devouring her for his inspiration when he isn’t ravaging her for his pleasure” (ii). Madoc’s failure as an artist and the shame associated with this failure is the impetus to his transformation from a seemingly ordinary man who struggles to fulfill his ambitions to a sadistic rapist who imprisons and tortures Calliope. By mastering his chosen field of writing, Madoc overcomes his failures but does so at the expense of his humanity.

Madoc's failures are both external, as his publishers are hounding him for a draft of his second novel of which he has written "not a word" (13), and internal, as he is suffering a crisis of gender identity. His agony is conveyed not only in his admission of failure, which he discloses to Fry and no one else, but also through his body language: he is shown crouching, his hands clenched in tension, his head bent to the ground, in the classic posture of shame or disgrace. As Gaiman writes in the *Sandman* script, included alongside the finished story, Madoc's appearance is intended to be "shadowy and pained. It's like he's baring his soul here" (8). Like the male hysteric, Madoc's body conveys his suppressed psychic conflict and emotions, manifesting his feelings of failure and inadequacy in his dejected posture. Indeed, the scenes depicting the interactions between Fry and Madoc are cast in dark shadows, stereotypically indicative of their shared malevolence and moral corruption, as well as their shared fear of inadequacy or failure.

The men's inner corruption is also reflected in the atmosphere of Fry's mansion, which is typically Gothic in its dark and gloomy appearance. This external space reflects the depravity and disorder of Fry's disturbed psyche. The two men are shown walking down a corridor, set with mirrors that reflect their faces (script 7). The mirror motif implies a scission between inner and outer self or appearance and reality, between Madoc's public persona and his disturbed and sadistic private self. This scission is also reflected in the doubling of the two men: Fry is Madoc's monstrous double, who mirrors his ambition and malevolence. Yet Fry is also pathetic and old. In this regard, Fry is also cast as the Oedipal father, where Madoc, the "son," takes up the patriarchal position of his father and replaces him. Fry's monstrosity is both physical, in his evil grin, frozen eyes, and long, clawlike fingernails, and moral, as perceived through his overt misogyny. Indeed, Fry is certainly akin to the devil in the Faustian legend. Despite these physical markers, however, he is still pitiable, living in isolation and pathetically concerned with his own fame, as evidenced in his request that Madoc persuade his publisher to bring one of his old novels back into print (17). Years later, it will be revealed that Fry kills himself, after "begging" (25) and failing to get his publishers to do so. Implicit in this death is the moral retribution for his past actions. Fry's fatal choice to poison himself is a glimpse at the Faustian outcome Madoc too will experience in the aftermath of his ruthless rise in fame.

The degraded position of Calliope as a sexual object is reinforced through illustrations of her naked body. Once inside Fry's secluded mansion, we are given the first glimpse of Calliope in a full-page illustration of her naked body, shadowed in darkness. As specified by Gaiman in his original script, Calliope's appearance is meant to be both beautiful and vulnerable (script 10). Her nudity is not supposed to "look titillating" but rather to illustrate "the vulnerability of nakedness" such as that of "famine victims, or concentration camp victims" (script 10). Indeed, her nudity is evidence that she has been mistreated by Fry. However, while Gaiman's text is clearly meant to invoke the reader's sympathies for Calliope in her mistreatment, the depiction of her eroticized body throughout the text is problematic, as it strays dangerously towards re-objectifying the woman as an aesthetic object of masculine artistry and mastery. The traditional position of the woman represented in art is as an idealized erotic object, where the female body is often visually represented as depersonalized, fragmented body parts (Gubar 713). As Laura Mulvey discusses in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the male gaze is traditionally centered on the "erotic spectacle" of "woman displayed as sexual object" (11). The woman displayed functions as the object for both the male artist and the male spectator. Arguably, however, Gaiman mitigates any eroticization of Calliope by promoting an empathic identification between the reader and Calliope, as facilitated through Oneiros's own identification with her.

In spite of Calliope's vulnerable, emaciated exterior and abject position, Gaiman does not erase her strength and dissidence. She defies Fry's authority by sarcastically questioning his actions: "What would you do with me now, Erasmus?" she asks when he enters her room with Madoc: "Am I now to perform for your amusement?" (17). Even through her forced imprisonment and repeated sexual assault, Calliope is resilient in defiance of her violator's attempt to appropriate all of her powers for himself. Gaiman specifies their relationship as follows: "He may have her spirit, but he doesn't have her soul" (script 11). This statement not only identifies the conditions that have kept Calliope trapped in Fry's possession, but also represents the complexities of her victimhood. Fry is literally the possessor of her spirit, for he had stalked her, discovering her at Mount Helicon in the spring of 1927, where he took ownership of her scroll, the deed to her spirit. He then burned her scroll, and with that act became her "master" (21). This

moment of dispossession haunts Calliope, causing her to feel that her victimization “had been her own fault” (21). These feelings of guilt and the loss of her spirit exemplify the complex psychology of the victim of sexual violence. Self-punishment is often the consequence of victim guilt, as historically the rape victim has been seen as at fault; this “blame the victim” mentality often constructs the female victim in particular as unconsciously wishing for sexual advances or not taking proper care in preventing the sexually aggressive actions of male perpetrators (Herman 117; L. Brown 122). While Gaiman depicts Calliope’s victimization as brought about by Fry’s despicable motive of mastery, he also explores the feelings of guilt, shame, and self-punishment that are frequently experienced by rape survivors.<sup>21</sup>

Calliope’s trauma is more complex than just the violation of her physical body. The act of rape can often signify more than just sexual degradation for the victim. As Laura Tanner explains in *Intimate Violence*, “physical violence functions as a means of claiming the victim not only as body but as speaking subject” (5), often inhibiting self-expression and “censoring” speech. Gaiman demonstrates this process of stealing body and voice by having his violator appropriate Calliope’s creative expression through the act of raping her. When Madoc brings Calliope back to his house, “his first action was to rape her” (18). We are told that she “choked back tears like a child” when he violates her: an image that conveys her pain and vulnerability as well as the disturbing brutality of Madoc’s unconscionable act of sexual violation. This violent act is justified in Madoc’s mind: “She’s not even human, he told himself” (18). However, his self-justifying reasoning is placed in doubt when he begins to fear his culpability: “It occurred to him

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<sup>21</sup> In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman discusses the socio-cultural and medical prejudices and biases that still exist in characterizing the female victim as somehow causing her traumatic experience or not taking enough initiative to end the abuse. Herman describes the common diagnosis of the female victim with personality disorders, as “dependent,” “masochistic” or “self-defeating,” instead of understanding “the corrosion of personality that occurs under conditions of prolonged terror” (117). Laura S. Brown also discusses how female victims of trauma are often “assumed to have contributed to her problem, in particular because of the interpersonal locus of her distress” (122). Both Brown and Herman argue that “the dominant culture, its forms and institutions” (122) need to be understood as perpetuating not only the biases against female victims (or minority groups), but also the social conditions that lead to trauma.

momentarily that the old man might have cheated him: given him a real girl. That he, Rick Madoc, might possibly have done something wrong, even criminal” (18). Yet once the creative inspiration starts flowing and Madoc begins writing at last, he feels justified in his actions. The fact that he feels entitled to rape a woman because “she’s not even human” (18) reflects an ideology of female sexual objectification. Calliope’s feelings, thoughts, and desires are rendered meaningless through Madoc’s narrow-minded pursuit of self-aggrandizement. By raping her, Madoc effectively steals Calliope’s voice, claiming her creativity as his own.

This motif of appropriation is a central part of representations of rape. The victim-violator relationships often involve “a violator who appropriates the victim’s subjectivity as an extension of his own power, . . . usurp[ing] the victim’s body, forcing it to assume the configurations of the violator’s decree” (Tanner 3). This act of appropriation is literally represented in Gaiman’s story in the stealing and burning of Calliope’s spirit scroll, her forced imprisonment, and her repeated rape by two men. Yet sexual violence in Gaiman’s narrative is meant to signify more than just the violator’s desire for power and mastery over the victim; when viewed within the context of the literary world, Calliope’s rape is representative of the systematic degradation, exclusion, and appropriation of women’s creativity under patriarchy.

The extent of Madoc’s appropriation of Calliope’s creative powers is shown through a two-page visual montage of his career successes ranging from the years 1987-1990, while Calliope is in his possession. During this time, he has fully embraced his role as Calliope’s “master,” telling her, “You’re my possession, until I tell you that you’re free. Don’t forget it. You’re my *personal* muse, sweetheart” (21). Over this period, Madoc achieves fame as author and artist, eventually expanding his career in the fields of poetry, playwriting, and film directing. As he is shown climbing the career ladder, Madoc’s growing egotism and hypocrisy are evident. At the book launch for his novel *And My Love She Gave Me Light*, Madoc is swarmed by a crowd of adoring fans. Madoc is pictured beside a young female fan, who praises him for his representation of strong female characters. To this compliment, Madoc replies, “Actually, I *do* regard myself as a feminist writer” (22). The hypocrisy of his self-proclaimed feminism emphasizes his ruthless possession of Calliope’s creativity and his deceitful exploitation of the female



voice in literary discourse. His appropriation of the feminist label also highlights the hypocrisy of his public persona. He hides his earlier shameful failures and his present monstrous sadism behind a façade of confidence and career success.

The elevation of his status as a writer also enables Madoc to expand his sexual conquests. At the height of his success, Madoc is pictured as escorting a “beautiful young woman . . . He’s resting one hand on her bottom, possessively and just a little offensively. She’s obviously hero-worshipping him” (script 21). Indeed, the young lady is flattering him, noting how he is now being considered “the greatest epic poet since Byron” (22). The association between Madoc and Byron suggests more than a continuation of a masculine literary tradition; the fact that Madoc shares certain characteristics with the Byronic hero<sup>22</sup> also reinforces Gaiman’s complex critique of masculine entitlement and womanizing. Helene Moglen discusses the archetypal Byronic hero as a figure who “need[s] to prove his masculinity by sexual conquest” and who “fears impotence and . . . loathes the aggression he must summon in himself as a defense against the sexual threat he imagines” (128). Madoc clearly shares much with the Byronic hero, both in his defensive need to prove his masculinity through sexual conquest and in his crisis of masculinity. Mario Praz also supports the characterization of the romantic “Byronic” hero as a villainous figure, going so far as to say that like the Gothic villain, the Byronic hero is a man who can be characterized as satanic, sadistic, and vampire-like (61-80).<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Praz illustrates how Byron’s “Fatal Man” is the embodiment of pleasure and pain, creation and destruction; the libertine behaviours of this hero-villain are deeply misogynist. Gaiman’s depiction of Rick Madoc is clearly meant to invoke this vision of

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<sup>22</sup> According to Peter L. Thorslev, the Byronic hero and its counterpart the Romantic hero do not possess “heroic virtue” in the usual sense; instead, Byronic heroes are often “thoroughgoing rebels” who possess many dark qualities (22). Often the Byronic hero appears as “monstrous and grotesque by the addition of gratuitous acts of cruelty or sadism” (22).

<sup>23</sup> The vampirism of Rick Madoc and Erasmus Fry is evident in their monstrous transformations, their secluded mansions, and their lecherous, parasitic consumption of Calliope. The Gothic mansion is also associated the terrorizing of young women by powerful men (Walpole *The Castle of Otranto*).

the Byronic hero, in the perverse pleasure Madoc derives from exploiting Calliope for his own selfish gain.

The close association between male creativity and phallic dominance is thus supported by patriarchy's theft of feminine agency. Calliope's powerlessness in this situation is clear when she calls upon a divine source for help. Specifically, Calliope calls upon her spiritual mothers to assist her and free her from her imprisonment. Three women appear in front of Calliope: Melete, the crone; Mneme, the mother; and Aiode, the maiden (script 16). The Virgin / Mother / Crone triple goddess is prevalent in Greek mythology. As specified by Hildebrandt and Morrow in the *Annotated Sandman*, these three goddesses are Muses that predate the nine children of Zeus and Mnemosyne. These mother-Muses are described by Gaiman as "not women but archetypes – . . . a Grecian variant on the one-who-is-three" (script 16). The triple aspect of this goddess archetype is meant to correspond to the "three phases of woman's life" (McLean 15): virginity, motherhood, and old age. While Gaiman is clearly drawing from Greek mythology and the Muse tradition, he is also drawing on other incarnations of the triple goddess that are equally well-known.<sup>24</sup> According to Pausanias in *The Description of Greece*, there were three original Muses, called "*Melete, Mneme, and Aoide*, which signify *meditation, memory and singing*" (57). In Gaiman's reinterpretation of Classical Greek myth, these original Muses are the mothers of the nine Muses<sup>25</sup> that are more often depicted in Classical Greek art.

Calliope calls upon these mothers to rescue her from her imprisonment. However, even these divine and powerful beings cannot help her: not only has she been "lawfully

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<sup>24</sup> In *The Triple Goddess* Adam McLean identifies a variety of mythological variations, including the Furies, the Fates, the Gorgons, The Sirens, the Horae and the Graces. Triple goddess figures are prominent in pagan fertility religions; however, with the rise in patriarchal monotheism, the goddess mythic variants were often replaced or usurped within society (12). For example, with Christianity, the triple goddess can be seen as being replaced by the monotheistic worship of God, or the Holy Trinity.

<sup>25</sup> The Nine Muses are: Clio, Euterpe, Thalia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Erato, Polyhymnia, Urania, and Calliope. According to Adam McLean's description of the Muses, Calliope, "first in rank among her sisters, was the Muse of Epic Poetry and Eloquence" (54).

bound” (19) to Madoc (via Fry) because Fry took possession of her scroll, but also, Mneme suggests, divine forces are no longer in a position to intervene in the mortal world. In Gaiman’s mythic universe, gods are not immune from pain or vulnerability; as Mneme states, “Many gods have died . . . , while aspects of other gods have been lost forever” (19). As Calliope laments, mortals have lost their respect and attachment to the gods; she remembers “the lost, golden days: when the nine were still sought and wooed and needed . . . when the music of the spheres still echoed in mortal souls” (21). This allusion to the “music of the spheres,” originating in the theories of Pythagoras, suggests a time of harmony. This “golden” age when mortals and gods / goddesses were in balanced harmony with each other has been degraded to the morally corrupt dystopia of contemporary society, where gods are imprisoned, tortured, and exploited for their powers by mortal men, a vision that is represented in the microcosm of Madoc’s rape and imprisonment of Calliope. Implicit in this decline of social order is the suggestion that goddesses (the female deities that embody a sacred feminine subjectivity) have also, like female humans, been degraded in the rise of patriarchal religions and materialistic lust for wealth and power. In the contemporary world in which Gaiman sets his story, Calliope cannot release herself, and her spiritual mothers are powerless to free her from Madoc’s imprisonment and sexual torture.

Calliope’s only hope is Oneiros / Morpheus / Dream, the masculine embodiment of the unconscious, a man who has fathered her child (Orpheus) and with whom she has shared a tumultuous relationship. Oneiros is part of “the Endless,” Gaiman’s family of universal aspects or forces in *The Sandman* universe: Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, Despair, Desire, and Delirium. These siblings are supremely powerful, predate the creation of gods and goddesses, and “antedate humanity itself” (Sanders 19). Each member of the Endless personifies and rules fundamental forces of the mortal world. As Joe Sanders explains, Oneiros’s role within the Endless is to “rule the domain that humans enter when they leave their waking consciousness in order to approach the things they most hope for or dread” (19). Oneiros is, in other words, the ruler of the unconscious mind, controlling dreams and nightmares (Hildebrandt and Morrow). Over the course of the series, Oneiros takes on multiple roles: “protector of humans, destroyer of humans, passionate but vengeful lover, distant and unsympathetic father, and aloof

immortal” (Sanders 19). While Oneiros and Calliope share a past together, at this point in the series their relationship is anything but amicable, as shown in Calliope’s reluctance to accept help from Oneiros and her animosity towards him, due to the complex circumstances of their previous relationship and the tragic death of their son, Orpheus.

Given Calliope’s strained relationship with Oneiros, the reader can appreciate the full extent of her pained call for help, for “someone, anyone . . . even Oneiros” (20) to help her escape her current imprisonment. However, at this point even Oneiros is unable to come to her rescue as he too has been “ensnared by mortals” and imprisoned “beneath the ground” (20). For three years, Calliope endures the torture of living as Madoc’s sexual prisoner until finally Oneiros appears at Madoc’s house. Presumably, Oneiros has received Calliope’s call for help through her “mother” Muses. When Oneiros confronts Madoc and demands that he set Calliope free, Madoc denies her existence in a display of anger and territoriality. Then, fearing Oneiros’s wrath, Madoc admits his desperation and inadequacy as a writer: “But you don’t understand – I need her. If I didn’t have her, I wouldn’t be able to write. I wouldn’t have ideas. I can’t free her yet” (27). Madoc’s bodily expression evokes his feelings of guilt and shame: his downcast face, his posture of insecurity and look of regret. Abjectly, Madoc then offers Oneiros money in exchange for Calliope, hoping that this gesture will be enough to placate him. Disgusted, Oneiros makes a speech deploring Madoc’s actions:

She has been held captive for more than sixty years. Stripped of all possessions. Demeaned, abused, and hurt. I . . . know how she must feel. And you will not free her because “you need the ideas?” You disgust me, Richard Madoc. You want ideas? You want dreams? You want stories? Then ideas you will have. Ideas in abundance. (27)

Oneiros’s own experience of imprisonment has indeed changed him; where he was once cold, indifferent, even cruel in his treatment of others, Oneiros now shows that he has compassion. He is able to empathize with Calliope’s degradation and abuse, having experienced a similar trauma (albeit, without experiencing sexual violation). Thus, when he curses Madoc with “[i]deas in abundance,” he is acting on Calliope’s behalf, enforcing the revenge that she is incapable of performing herself. While Oneiros, as agent of Calliope’s revenge, can be interpreted as yet another figure of masculine dominance, he

is a more complex character than the “superman” or “avenger” figure; he is more than a male protector who arrives to rescue a damsel in distress.

As a masculine figure, Oneiros occupies a complex subject position in relation to Calliope, the rape victim. It is clearly implied that Oneiros feels sorry for Calliope’s abuse and forced imprisonment, as he states, “I no longer hate you, Calliope. I have learned much in recent times” (33). He has gained insight by experiencing his own victimization and has now forgiven his former wife for their bitter split. And yet he maintains a stoic, emotional detachment in all of their scenes together. He is aloof and cold, rejecting Calliope’s suggestion that they should meet again in “the dream realm” (33). He is thus capable of both coldness and compassion. Oneiros’s enigmatic duality as both nurturing and emotionally indifferent is analyzed by Sanders, who identifies Oneiros as a father-figure (25). Indeed, he even addresses his ex-wife, Calliope, as “child” (33), which could be construed as diminishing her subjectivity, yet he takes on this patriarchal role in relation to everybody, not only women. Specifically, Sanders sees this paternalism as exemplified in Oneiros’s public role as ruler of the unconscious. Oneiros’s position is rigidly defined by a sense of duty “to protect his area of responsibility, the supernatural realm called Dreaming” (Sanders 25). However, this public role often opposes his private feelings, causing him to struggle with his guilt and compassion. Oneiros remains remote and distant, yet his actions tell a different story. He will not be complicit in Calliope’s rape and imprisonment. The model of masculinity embodied by Oneiros is characterized by great power, yet he wields this power differently. Oneiros’s masculinity presents a divergent path of empathy, understanding, and justice, in contrast to that of men like Madoc and Fry, who exploit and abuse others for personal gain.

Calliope’s liberation culminates in her self-expression, when she asserts herself against the destructive influence of Madoc’s sexual violence. Once Oneiros initiates vengeance against Madoc by bombarding him with nightmarish ideas, Madoc confronts Calliope with anger, threatening her with violence. As described in Gaiman’s original script, Madoc looks like “he’s really ready to beat the shit out of her” (script 30) as he screams ineffectually, “Or so help me, I’ll, I’ll . . .” (28). Calliope, on the other hand, calmly but defiantly stares back at him, her face framed in a close-up. As Gaiman comments in his script: “She looks proud, like she’s pulled whatever remnants of dignity

she has around her, because she knows that Ric's time has come" (script 30). In this moment, seeing Madoc unravel before her, Calliope is able to assert herself alongside Oneiros's actions. At this point, Calliope is able to voice her dissent: "You know nothing about me, Richard Madoc. I am real, Richard. I am more than a receptacle for your seed, or an inspiration for your tales" (28). Calliope's self-assertion acts as both a restoration of her voice and reclamation of her body in the aftermath of her repeated rape. By announcing that "I am real," Calliope is asserting her presence as a person who will no longer be objectified and imprisoned within the male imagination. In this way, Calliope's statement of her autonomy and personhood reaffirms the sentiment of Andrea Dworkin, quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, of the significance of female self-determination and assertion of "humanness" (83). As Gaiman represents, the struggle to overcome the constraints of oppression requires both the active resistance of female subjects like Calliope and the cooperation of male subjects like Oneiros, who use their power to support the process of women's liberation.

Madoc's downfall occurs as a consequence of Oneiros's intervention and the return of Calliope's autonomy. Madoc is effectively driven into a manic frenzy, seized by hypergraphia or a self-destructive and obsessive drive to write.<sup>26</sup> His thoughts are uncontrollable, splintering his consciousness into a thousand disparate ideas, which eventually lead him to perform a disturbing act of self-mutilation. Artists Kelley Jones and Malcolm Jones III reinforce Madoc's psychotic break by utilizing imagery of shattered glass and framing each panel with jagged lines. The visual effect captures the agony and torment going on inside Madoc's mind as his self-control and identity are shattered. He uses his fingertips to write with his own blood all of the ideas that have overtaken his mind. Like Faust, who signs his soul away with his own blood, Madoc uses his own bloody hands to pen his thoughts. His disfigured fingers, pictured as bloody, clawlike nubs, not only are a visual symbol of Madoc's descent into psychosis, but also link him to his predecessor, Erasmus Fry, who earlier in the story is portrayed with long,

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<sup>26</sup> Hypergraphia, the compulsion to write, is discussed in Alice Flaherty in *The Midnight Disease* as related to the psychological "drive to creativity" (49) and as associated with manic episodes. Inversely, writer's block is associated with depression and anxiety. Notably, Flaherty lists "a consuming desire for fame" (134) as one of the catalysts to writer's block, an affliction that is clearly seen in Rick Madoc.

clawlike fingernails and who suffers a similar abject breakdown. Like his predecessor Fry, Madoc has become a monstrous man, whose obsession with fame and fortune has taken over his humanity. Madoc's guilt and shame will forever be written on his body through his disfigured hands.

As Madoc loses control of his mind and body, he is aligned with the image of the male hysteric. Forced by Oneiros into an abject and feminized position of powerless victim, Madoc must confront his fears of failure and inadequacy. Indeed, in a sense, Oneiros has "raped" Madoc's mind, forcibly entering his unconscious and leaving him in a state of abjection. Madoc loses hold of his masculine façade of power and self-control, literally de-facing himself with his claw-like fingers. This embodied expression of Madoc's self-destruction can also be seen as a manifestation of castration or loss of masculine power and mastery. When Madoc is forced to free Calliope, he is effectively relinquishing his sense of entitlement and phallic mastery over her. Even after Calliope has Oneiros release Madoc from his nightmarish affliction, Madoc is filled with an emptiness that haunts him. The final page depicts Madoc's struggle to come to terms with his loss: "I wish I could remember. . . . It's so hard to think . . . She's gone, you see. And it's all gone with her. Everything. All of them, all the dream . . . No . . . I can't remember. I've lost it . . . I've got no idea any more" (34). Interspersed with these thoughts are blank panels, and pictures of Oneiros disappearing from view. The stark white panels affirm the loss of Madoc's ability to visualize and create, a reiteration of the Oedipal myth and the transformative knowledge of masculine castration and fallibility.

In a way, by telling Calliope's story of rape and imprisonment and depicting Rick Madoc's downfall, Gaiman's narrative is also a version of the rape-and-revenge genre. This cinematic genre began in the 1960s-1970s as sexual "exploitation" films such as *Day of the Woman / I Spit on your Grave* (1978), *Ms. 45* (1981) and *Lipstick* (1976). More recently, feminist filmmakers have revisioned the rape-and-revenge genre, eliminating the gratuitous nudity and sexual content of early films, to present a vision of female empowerment that challenges women's social-sexual degradation under patriarchy. Films like *Thelma and Louise* (1991), *Monster* (2003), *Descent* (2007), and *Kill Bill* (2003) all fall within this genre. The basic premise is that the female subject suffers sexual violation and often other forms of patriarchal oppression such as domestic

abuse, poverty, and harassment; she survives this brutality then initiates her own violent revenge against her rapists or other men. The woman's revenge enacts a form of wish-fulfillment in that her violence supposedly resolves the conflicts and abjection inherent in the victim subject-position; specifically, her revenge transforms her passive victimization into an active pursuit of vigilante justice. Through her violent retaliation, the female subject is empowered, often to the extent that she becomes Phallic, wielding a phallic weapon (gun, knife, sword), and castrates (figuratively or literally) her male violator(s). As described by Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery*, the "revenge fantasy is one form of the wish for catharsis" (189). By taking up the role of the perpetrator, the trauma survivor "imagines she can get rid of the terror, shame and pain of the trauma by retaliating against the perpetrator" (189). The trauma victim may also imagine that revenge "is the only way to force the perpetrator to acknowledge the harm he has done to her" (189). In Herman's understanding, this type of revenge fantasy often fails to alleviate the victim's feelings of "helpless fury" (189). Rather, Herman sees revenge as a "magical resolution" (189) that cannot replace the long, difficult process of grieving that follows a traumatic experience.

Although Gaiman's narrative can be seen as a form of wish-fulfillment for the trauma survivor in his depiction of rape-and-revenge, there are key differences in his portrayal of the gender configurations within the genre. Firstly, Gaiman depicts Calliope as merciful, not vindictive. She asks Oneiros to release Madoc from the burden of his psychological torment. Her display of compassion towards the man who has raped and imprisoned her is as much a resolution for her as is Oneiros's violent retaliation. Arguably, this difference does not detract from Gaiman's representation of sexual violation or female empowerment, but rather highlights the psychological complexities of the victim subject-position. In this way, Gaiman's portrayal of rape and revenge moves beyond wish-fulfillment to a more desirable resolution wherein Calliope is liberated from her physical and emotional imprisonment when she releases her hatred towards Madoc. Rape and revenge are thus reimagined in Gaiman's portrayal as rape, revenge, and release. While she may not forgive Madoc, Calliope does show him mercy in having Oneiros stop inundating Madoc with uncontrolled thoughts.



Another key difference in Gaiman's version of the rape-and-revenge genre is that a masculine figure, Oneiros, who has also experienced his own degradation and imprisonment, acts as the vehicle of Calliope's revenge against her rapist. This substitution of a male avenger in place of a female agent of revenge is a powerful reflection of Gaiman's feminist sympathies in his creation of a masculine figure who can empathize and understand to some extent what it means to be put in a traditionally feminine subject-position. The significance of having a male subject take up Calliope's burden and revenge can be seen in relation to the subject position of pro-feminist men. Specifically, Oneiros acknowledges his own power and privilege, yet acts on behalf and in the best interests of those who suffer from injustice. Oneiros forces Madoc into taking responsibility for his unethical behaviour and misogynistic attitude by instigating his hysteria and loss of "phallic" mastery over Calliope. Madoc's hysterical affliction is thus a confrontation with his own abjection and what it means to be victimized.

On its own, Gaiman's graphic short story "Calliope" is a powerful narrative of one woman's experience of rape, revenge, and liberation from sexual exploitation. However, set within the complex narrative of *The Sandman* series, Calliope's story becomes a rich tapestry of allusion, intertextuality, and social critique. Drawing from myth, archetype, and literature, Gaiman's fantasy narrative identifies the literary and cultural traditions of phallogocentrism and female objectification. Patriarchal authorship, as portrayed through the characters of Fry and Madoc, presupposes women's degradation and appropriation in the interests of masculine entitlement and ambition. Central to his critique, Gaiman depicts the downfall of powerful men: Erasmus Fry, once a successful author, is portrayed as a failure, abject, monstrous, and pathetic; Rick Madoc, who also experiences enormous career successes, ends the story as he began, in a state of emptiness and imaginative barrenness; and finally, Oneiros, the hero, who is more powerful than the gods, ends the entire series by dying at the hands of the Furies.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In contrast with Fry's and Madoc's, Oneiros's downfall is an almost Christ-like act of self-sacrifice; when he grants his son his wish to die, Oneiros seals his own fate to die for spilling family blood, a sacrilege for immortals. As a result of his merciful act, Oneiros follows the rules of blood debts and forfeits his life to the Furies.

Although Oneiros is depicted as cold, indifferent, and unloving throughout the series, he is able to transcend his rigid role to help others escape from their imprisonment: whether it is releasing Calliope from Madoc or, in a subsequent tale, releasing his son, Orpheus, from the imprisonment of his immortality. Ultimately, Oneiros's change from indifference and stoicism to compassion is also a gendered transformation. Having experienced a feminized position of degradation, Oneiros is finally able to understand what victims go through. In this way, Gaiman's "Calliope" and more generally *The Sandman* series promote a form of empathic understanding in place of selfish ambition. It is this message that is perhaps the most fundamental feminist component of Gaiman's work.

## Chapter Three

### **The Violence of Masculine Self-Fashioning and Homosociality in Ian McEwan's “Homemade”**

Ian McEwan's early fiction, including his short story collections *First Love, Last Rites* and *In Between the Sheets* as well as his novels *The Cement Garden* and *In The Comfort of Strangers*, is frequently characterized as “Shock Lit”: a phrase that denotes not only the lurid quality of the prose, but also the repulsive subject matter, which includes stories of rape, incest, molestation, sadomasochism, obsession, perversion, and murder. Both Jack Slay Jr. and Dominic Head discuss Ian McEwan's fiction in relation to its characterization as “Shock Lit.” Head situates the shocking nature of McEwan's early fiction as a phase that reflects a more general “contemporary malaise” in society (50). In Head's understanding, McEwan's “shock” is a “defeat of sensibility” (35), which he sees as a “literary-historical shock” (35). The movement away from emotional response to a position of amorality is developed through McEwan's use of narrators who are also “the perpetrator[s] of violence” (35). Slay Jr. also discusses McEwan's fiction in the context of “Shock Lit.,” noting his similarities to authors like Martin Amis, Kathy Acker, Angela Carter, and Bret Easton Ellis. Slay emphasizes the cultural critique implicit in the disturbing brutality of these texts, suggesting that these authors are merely reflecting contemporary society (9-13). Although these themes are often deemed by critics to be bizarre and sensational, McEwan's focus on such depravity in the everyday world and among ordinary people is perhaps the most disturbing feature of his work. His fiction delves into the dark drives and desires of ordinary men and women, revealing disturbing realities about the human psyche. Instead of characterizing his violators as stock villains, as powerful monsters, McEwan's psychological probing of these deeply disturbed characters reveals how it is often ordinary fear, immaturity and feelings of isolation that compel seemingly “normal” people to commit horrific acts of sexual violence. While not exclusively male (the perpetrators are notably female in the stories “Pornography” and “Disguises”), McEwan's disturbed characters enact sexual violence as psychologically motivated by patriarchal values. In particular, the drive and desire of men to live up to

patriarchal values and the gender conventions of masculinity are shown to perpetuate a virulent strand of sadomasochism in society.

In relation to gender conventions, McEwan's fiction "shocks" his audience by not concealing the ways in which patriarchy corrupts and disturbs relationships between men and women, and relationships among men. Masculine figures in his stories are often immoral, acting out their aggression through sexual violence against women; as noted by Peter Childs, women in McEwan's fiction are often "entangled and injured in the process of male rites of passage" (14). For example, in "Homemade," an adolescent male's initiation into sexual maturity culminates with the rape of his ten-year-old sister. The protagonist, a fourteen-year-old boy, shows little remorse for his actions; rather, he feels pride in assuming a "manly position" (29). This desire to become a real man becomes a repeated motif in McEwan's works. By showing how certain men systematically exploit and violate women or feminized others as a means to achieve their desired hyper-masculine status, McEwan illustrates through graphic and disturbing detail the real-life horrors of patriarchy.

While men are the primary instigators of sexual violence in McEwan's writing, their misogynistic attitudes are shown to be the product of a patriarchal society that is inherently sick. As Jack Slay Jr. states, "the seemingly bizarre characters and circumstances of his fiction are frequently ordinary, necessary responses of those existing in society gone mad" (12). This so-called "madness" of society not only reflects the cruel, bleak indifference of the modern city, as Slay argues, but also implicates patriarchal values as a primary source of society's moral disintegration. To understand how violence, particularly sexual violence, is inherent in patriarchy, it is necessary to understand the psychodynamics of masculine gender identity, both individual and collective. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva discusses how male mastery is driven by fear and denial of femininity and the female body. Kristeva highlights how "a male, phallic power is vigorously threatened by the no less virulent power of the other sex," even when this "other sex" is oppressed (70). This fear is enacted through "a strong concern for separating the sexes," on both social and symbolic levels (70). The feminine power that threatens male, phallic dominance is symbolically seen as defiling masculine identity; in this way, "the masculine, apparently victorious, confesses through its very relentlessness

against the other, the feminine, that it is threatened by an asymmetrical, irrational, wily, uncontrollable power” (70). Acts of sexual persecution against women and feminized others can be viewed as fear-driven rather than solely as an exercise of dominance and mastery.

As McEwan illustrates in the stories of *First Love*, *Last Rites* and his early fiction,<sup>28</sup> masculine identity requires frequent symbolic acts of sexual violence to define and defend its boundaries from the feminine; these performances of violence are characteristically hysterical symptoms of gender conflict and insecurity. Kieran Ryan astutely addresses, in relation to McEwan’s work, that “the survival of patriarchal culture depends on the disavowal of the feminized flesh, [as] maleness must be forced into being over and over again through acts and attitudes fuelled by hatred and fear, through a pathological obsession with keeping vulnerability at bay” (12). Like Ryan, I read McEwan’s work as representing the horrors of sexual violence in order to critique patriarchal ideology, where male characters are plagued by fears and anxieties, which they both disavow and perform through desperate acts of conformity to the ideal of phallic masculinity.

In an interview with John Haffenden, Ian McEwan asserts that it is not hatred but fear that underlies the misogyny of patriarchal relations: “There is among men a fear of women and of their power. . . . I see this defensiveness as a burden for men, and not just as the thing men do to women” (177). McEwan’s assertion that men fear women and their power is reminiscent of Kristeva’s thesis above. This fear can be seen through the repudiation of weakness (castration) and through acts of masculine self-fashioning. In other words, men perform masculinity as a way of denying their fears of femininity and

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<sup>28</sup> Other examples of McEwan’s fiction that illustrate how masculinity draws upon symbolic acts of violence against female or feminized Others include the short story “Pornography,” where the male protagonist O’Byrne deceives two women by dating them at the same time and infects each woman with a venereal disease. In “Butterflies,” a socially isolated man sexually assaults and then kills a girl. Even a story like “Last Day of Summer,” where the maternal figure dies accidentally, McEwan addresses how a masculine subject requires a symbolic death or denial of its dependence on the female body in order to become a man (Ryan 7). McEwan’s first novel *The Cement Garden* also depicts the perspective of a male adolescent in Jack, who also exhibits sadism and masochism in his violent behaviour following the death of his mother.

defending the constructed boundaries of their gender identity. However, as McEwan illustrates again and again in his narratives, the burden of continuously defending the boundaries of masculinity eventually betrays the artificiality of the patriarchal persona by showing the fault lines of an identity in crisis. Male hysteria, “homosexual panic,”<sup>29</sup> and the so-called “crisis of masculinity”<sup>30</sup> are just a few of the terms that have been used to describe the experience of men struggling within the constraints of patriarchal gender conventions. Discourses on male hysteria emphasize that men’s bodies can signify conflicts of gender identity: conflicts that could not otherwise be expressed, as these feelings are derived from fear, shame, and guilt, sentiments believed to be alien to patriarchal masculinity.

The masculine characters of McEwan’s early fiction reveal how masculine subjectivity is constructed and performed on the borderline of abjection, as neither permanent nor fully controlled, but rather continually under threat of dissolution and in need of constant affirmation and self-punishment. Like Oedipus, McEwan’s narrator sets himself on a grotesque course of self-discovery, fuelled by an insatiable desire to know the pleasures of adult sexuality. To achieve this aim, the narrator is willing to break with social conventions. His transgression of the status quo occurs on multiple levels, including disrespecting not only the women in his life, but also the working-class men in his community. Specifically, in his ridicule of his father’s and uncles’ hard work ethic, the narrator’s actions are Oedipal, as a symbolic “murder” of the father, disavowal of the

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<sup>29</sup> In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick illustrates how hatred of homosexuality or fear of being oneself a homosexual are constructed as “homosexual panic,” a pathological condition that reduces accountability for violence. Sedgwick reveals “how hatred of homosexuals is even more public, more typical” (19) in patriarchal societies. Misogynistic violence as I understand it can also be aligned with the presence of gay-bashing in patriarchal societies; in both, it is fear and repudiation of femininity and feminized desire that are catalysts to such gender violence.

<sup>30</sup> The term “crisis of masculinity” has been used as something of a catch-all to describe the socio-cultural shifts of the past thirty years, where the category of masculinity has been problematized as a social construction. The 1999 film *Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity* is one example of this interrogation of masculinity. In the film, Jackson Katz looks at masculine gender identity as a performative guise that promotes violence and domination through cultural representations.

established order, and transgression of the moral authority of patriarchal society. The culmination of this transgression is the narrator's incestuous seduction of his ten-year-old sister while they are playing a game of "Mummies and Daddies" (24). It is this detail that identifies the Oedipal myth as a subtext of McEwan's story. The Oedipal downfall from king to outcast is also reiterated in the quest motif of McEwan's story, where the boys' desire to lose his virginity and achieve masculine dominance becomes a disturbing tale of sadism, "incest and self-abuse" (9). In this first-person narrative, the adult narrator looks back at this experience with derision for his pathetic adolescent self yet with little remorse for his violation of his sister. The ironic tone of the story is that of the cold, intellectual adult narrator, who appears to look back at the traumatic episode with indifference, detached from the severity of the abuse he initiated. Indeed, within the structure of the story itself, the narrator clearly minimizes his sister's suffering to place the focus on his homosocial bond with Raymond.

In "Homemade," McEwan draws together sadomasochism and masculinity in such a way as to highlight how conventional masculine gender roles, behaviours, and attitudes are firmly entrenched within a perverse, deeply disturbed conflation of power and the infliction of suffering. Sexual gratification occurs in conjunction with a sadistic assertion of power over another resulting in sexual trauma. Perhaps even more disturbing than the boy's abuse of power is the narrator's implication that Connie, his ten-year-old sister, is complicit in her rape by inviting her own sexual violation. If we are to trust the narrator's description of the event, Connie spreads her legs and guides him "into her tight, dry little-girl's cunt" (42). The narrator falls back into the conventional misogynistic logic that a female is not raped if she invites sex through provocative attire or behaviour, even when her consent is never given. The implication is that the narrator seems less morally culpable for the abuse, even though we see how he has manipulated the situation and abused his sister's trust.

The cumulative experience of reading McEwan's portrayals of manliness is to be shocked and disturbed not only by the crimes the perpetrator commits, but more generally by patriarchy's crime in fostering destructive gender relationships. The narrator's abuse of power arises out of his desire to be manly, in conformity with the "normal" or "natural" expectations of hegemonic masculinity. In this sense, McEwan's contribution to

“Shock Lit” is not solely aesthetically driven, but also polemical: a statement about gender politics in post-war Britain. Indeed, McEwan’s depiction of masculinity reflects a historical moment of crisis, wherein both hegemonic masculinity and the national identity of Britain were undergoing a period of conflict following the decline of the British empire and lasting effects of warfare (Sinfield 141).

“Homemade” begins where it ends: with a young girl weeping as she sits on the side of the bathtub, having just been sexually violated by her fourteen-year-old brother. As shocking and disturbing as this scenario is, it is the pride and triumph felt by the boy who has just committed this rape which is perhaps the most horrifying aspect of the story. The boy’s sense of accomplishment in losing his virginity eclipses any remorse he feels for his sister’s suffering. In his mature reflection on the event, the narrator recognizes that it was his relationship with Raymond, his boyhood friend, mentor, and sometimes rival, rather than his sister, that was the catalyst of this act. Indeed, Raymond and the narrator exemplify the homosocial bond between men that is supported and produced through the sexual traffic of women: in this case, the sexually experienced Lulu Smith and the sister, Connie.

In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s interpretation of male homosociality, the female object deflects homoerotic desires between the men; this female or feminized third party is often represented as the love interest of the two men, although this woman may also be the target of the men’s mutual derision (2).<sup>31</sup> In this way, Sedgwick illustrates how in “any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power” (25). While Sedgwick focuses on the latent sexual desires that exist within these male bonds, Michael S. Kimmel emphasizes how male homosociality functions in relation to power and social standing: “Ideologies of manhood have functioned primarily in relation to the gaze of male peers and male authority. What men need is men’s approval” (186). The homosocial bond between men includes women only as “a kind of currency that men use to improve

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<sup>31</sup> The position of feminized other in the homosocial triangle may also be occupied by a man. This male figure is made the target of violence and homophobia, to deflect any homoeroticism in male-male homosocial relationship.



their ranking on the masculine social scale” (186). These descriptions of male bonding within patriarchal societies are reflected throughout McEwan’s narrative, as male homosociality becomes the determining factor in the narrator’s sexual violation of his sister.

The narrator recalls the homosocial dynamic of the friendship between himself and Raymond: “Raymond was fifteen, a year older than I was . . . it was Raymond who *knew* things, it was Raymond who conducted my education. It was Raymond who initiated me into the secrets of adult life which he understood himself intuitively but never totally” (10). Part of the irony McEwan develops throughout the story is that Raymond is not suited for his position as a teacher or authority on adult life. Raymond “could not smoke because it made him cough, the whisky made him ill, the [horror] films frightened him or bored him, the cannabis did not affect him” (13), and his attempts at masturbation end only in disappointment. It is the narrator himself who excels at “a variety of pleasures . . . rightly associated with the adult world” (13). These adult pastimes are not solely pleasures to be enjoyed by the two boys; they are also trials or tests of their gender identity. The younger, more ignorant narrator is the one who fully experiences and enjoys adult vices such as drinking, smoking, and masturbation; as well, he revels in succeeding when Raymond fails. In this way, Raymond represents a male Other against whom the narrator measures his own successes or failures as a man. In these trials of masculinity, the narrator not only learns from Raymond but also surpasses him in the race for power and dominance.

Implicit in the boys’ relationship is an element of homosocial bonding that encompasses both their enjoyment of adult pastimes and their sexuality. The boy’s friendship is fuelled by their emergence as sexual beings. The narrator describes this period of his early adolescence as “the dawn of my sexual day” (12). Specifically, this moment of sexual awakening occurs when Raymond first introduces him to the pleasures of masturbation: “We were exploring a cellar on a bomb site, poking around to see what the dossers had left behind, when Raymond, having lowered his trousers as if to have a piss, began to rub his prick with a coruscating vigour, inviting me to do the same” (12). While in the seclusion of this abandoned bomb shelter, a site that is significant in its

relation to Britain's patriarchal militarism,<sup>32</sup> the two boys engage in masturbation, leading to the narrator's ejaculation onto Raymond's jacket pocket. The narrator's success in ejaculation in contrast to Raymond's failure suggests an element of phallic competition between the two boys. The latent homoeroticism of this episode, and indeed of their entire friendship, supports the idea that in patriarchal societies, men's relationships with one another are as "intense and potent" as a lover's bond to his beloved (Sedgwick 21). In a way, Raymond is the one real love interest in the story, as it is his approval that the narrator seeks in all of his trials of adult initiation, especially with regard to his sexual expertise.

As a friend, mentor, and teacher, Raymond is the object of both desire and identification for the narrator. Raymond possesses a superior knowledge about the adult world, and the narrator desires this knowledge for himself. As a role model, Raymond promotes delinquency and disturbing acts of violence that include acts of animal cruelty: "Raymond, in his earlier, delinquent days . . . fed glass splinters to the pigeons" and together they "roasted alive Sheila Harcourt's budgerigar" (13). These acts of cruelty reflect the monstrosity of the boys but can also be seen as reflecting a commonplace cruelty against animals. Indeed, within a patriarchal system that perpetuates unequal power relations, sadistic violence against the weak or vulnerable is "normal" or "natural" behaviour. It is not only animals that are objectified and brutalized through the boys' cruelty, but also females who become targets of their violence. The alignment between misogyny and cruelty to animals is further developed throughout the story in the symbolic associations made between the female body and abject animality.

Raymond and the narrator are not alone in their degradation of women. Rather, their "knowledge" is produced by a flawed system of masculine bravado, hearsay, and sexual "folklore" supported by the men in their community. The narrator's socialization into masculine gender conventions is guided not only by Raymond, his peer, but also by

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<sup>32</sup> Indeed, as Carolyn Logan suggests, bombs or missiles are often associated with phallic power and competition, where a nuclear arms race is "phallic worship," and "missile envy" of another nation's arms is motivation for a buildup of weapons (126). In this way, masculinity identity and national identity are shown to mutually inform each other in the alignment of patriarchal militarism.

the workmen who frequent the local café. From these men, Raymond and the narrator listen to stories of

cunts, bits, skirt, of strokings, beatings, fuckings, suckings, of arses and tits, behind, above, below, in front, with, without, of scratching and tearing, licking and shitting, of juiced cunts streaming, warm and infinite, of others cold and arid but worth a try, of pricks old and limp, or young and ebullient, of coming, too soon, too late or not at all, of how many times a day, of attendant diseases, of pus and swellings, cankers and regrets, of poisoned ovaries and destitute testicles . . . in an unreal complex of timeworn puns and innuendo, formulas, slogans, folklore and bravado. (15-16)

In this descriptive catalog of sexual triumphs and tribulations, the corporeality of sexuality is front and center. Indeed, the narrator objectifies body parts, the cunts and pricks, by not mentioning the persons whose parts these are. In this way, sexual objectification forms the basis of Raymond's and the narrator's knowledge of adult sexual relationships. This dehumanizing of sexuality occurs in the symbolic positioning of men as "'being' and . . . 'having . . . the phallus'" and in the "collapse of masculinity into its 'part'" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 139). This fiction of phallic masculinity can also be viewed as having a compensatory function in the narrator's society, indicating the conflict and anxieties within post-war Britain around its faltering empire.

Within the dominant culture, to be masculine is to possess and master the phallus, a feat that can only be done by mastering one's sexuality. The narrator experiences his virginity as a barrier to becoming an adult that must be overcome if he is to be a man. As McEwan illustrates, sexual conquest and gender identity are culturally entwined through timeworn constructions, where it is the men of the community who advocate this knowledge. From a Foucauldian perspective, it is easy to see how the boys' knowledge is produced within the system of patriarchal power. As Foucault describes, "power. . . produces effects at the level of desire – and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it. If it has been possible to constitute a knowledge of the body, this has been by way of an ensemble of military and educational disciplines" (*Power / Knowledge* 59). The culture of male dominance consolidates a position of power through its production and maintenance of knowledge and desire. As

boys, Raymond and the narrator desire to emulate this model of masculinity as a way to attain the desired “manly position.” Notably, in retrospect, the narrator recognizes how this knowledge is based on the “unreal complex” (29) of the male imagination, where folklore and bravado colour the information that the boys receive. It will be this fiction of masculine sexual prowess and the objectification of sex, supported by his peers and the men in his community, which will become a contributing factor in the narrator’s decision to rape his sister.

Although the narrator and Raymond regard these workmen with a desire to know what they know, there is also an element of derision for these same men, due to the boys’ class-consciousness. The narrator describes how he and Raymond would laugh at the hard-work ethic of the men:

I used to laugh when I thought of the twelve-hour shift my father worked in the flour mill, of his exhausted, blanched, ill-tempered face when he got home in the evening, and I laughed a little louder when I thought of the thousands who each morning poured out of the terraced houses like our own to labour through the week, rest up on Sunday and then back again on Monday to toil in the mills, factories, timber yards and quaysides of London . . . I laughed with Raymond at how, to reassure themselves, they made a virtue of this lifetime’s grovel, at how they prized themselves for never missing a day in the inferno. (31)

Through this description, McEwan creates a stark contrast between working-class masculinity and the elitist immaturity of Raymond and narrator. Indeed, the boys deride and ridicule the idea of an honest day of hard work. Stealing and re-selling books has enabled the narrator and Raymond to be “richer than any of my many uncles or my poor overworked father or anyone else I knew” (17); yet they have done nothing to earn this wealth or power. The boys’ laughter exemplifies a breakdown in the patriarchal order of responsibility and respect that is traditionally passed down from father to son. This model of patriarchy is premised on the role of men taking on both public and private responsibilities as leaders in the community and in their family.<sup>33</sup> The narrator ridicules

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<sup>33</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines patriarchy as “[a] form of social organization in which the father or oldest male is the head of the family, and descent and relationship are reckoned through the male line; government or rule by a man or men.” This definition

the value placed on this model of manhood as he laughs discreetly when “uncles Bob or Ted or my father made me a present of one of their hard-earned shillings” (17). In this gift of wealth from father to son, these men are “patricians dispensing to their son or nephew in the wisest, most generous way, the fruits of their sagacity and wealth – they were gods in their own temple” (18). The narrator’s irreverence toward his father’s gifts suggests that while the boys desire the knowledge and experiences of the adult world, they are interested solely in the pleasures and vices of this position, and not its responsibilities. In this way, the boys’ behaviour transgresses the boundary of the dominant social order, as they are willing to commit acts that no decent man would do.

As noted above, in this homosocial economy there is not only desire and identification, but also a rivalry for power. Just as he feels superior to the working class men of the community, the narrator also looks down on Raymond for his failed attempts to be manly, illustrating the dynamic of rivalry that circulates among men in a patriarchal system. The narrator desires to know everything that Raymond does and more, even if this knowledge is constructed through adolescent fantasies and a fiction of masculine bravado. McEwan dramatizes the boys’ rivalry for power by using the motif of a race. The cross-country race that Raymond participates in, and that the narrator watches from the sidelines, is not only “a vision of human futility” (19) but also a demonstration of the misery of competition between men. The narrator enjoys Raymond’s failure and professes an “elation, a gay fascination with the triumphant spirit of human losers who had run themselves into the ground for nothing at all” (20). In an earlier passage, he refers to Raymond as a comic figure, a clown or fool who suffers the cruel hand of Fortune (18). Aligning Raymond with literary figures like Arlecchino and Feste (20),<sup>34</sup>

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emphasizes the authority and structuring of power in the conventional patriarchal role, where power is transferred from father to son.

<sup>34</sup> The figure of the fool, clown, harlequin or jester is a stage character often represented as a rustic buffoon or a retainer of a court or great house (OED, “clown”). In Shakespeare, the fool is often the instigator of the action of the play, the speaker of truth, a social critic, or representative of confusion (Janik 186). Ironically, while Raymond instigates much of the bad behaviour committed by the boys, he is not the leader; it is the narrator who sees himself as superior, takes the dominant role in their relationship and excels at criminal acts. The narrator looks down on Raymond as a fool, but also seems to embody many of the dark qualities of the clown character: deception, trickery, subversion

the narrator positions Raymond as inferior to himself. Indeed, it is clear that the narrator is empowered and pleased by other men's suffering, including his so-called friend's.

The pleasure that the narrator experiences in witnessing the suffering of others can be aligned with the notion of scopophilia developed by Laura Mulvey and Steve Neale, and originating in the theories of Sigmund Freud. Mulvey identifies an element of sadism and castration anxiety in the voyeuristic act of male spectatorship. In Mulvey's configuration of man as "active bearer of the look" and woman as spectacle (27), she suggests that the male voyeur receives "pleasure . . . in ascertaining guilt – asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness" (29). Building from Mulvey's argument, Neale takes up the idea of male spectatorship as a position of power, suggesting that the "gulf between the seer and the seen . . . allows the spectator a degree of power over what is seen. It hence tends constantly to involve sado-masochistic phantasies and themes" (11-12). While Mulvey focuses on the female as object of male gaze, Neale argues that men, too, can occupy this feminized position. McEwan illustrates this power dynamic in the scopophilic relationship between the two boys, where dominance results from being seen as successful (that is, masculine) in the eyes of other men. Adapting Mulvey's interpretation of the cinematic gaze to McEwan's fiction, one can see how the narrator takes up this voyeuristic position in relation to both female and male objects. The way in which the narrator views Raymond suggests that there is an element of sadistic pleasure in seeing Raymond fail and be shamed by the "practical jokes" of "Fortuna" (18); however, Fortuna "never spat in his face or trod deliberately on his existential corns" as Raymond's failings were always "comic rather than tragic" (18). The implication of this passage is, perhaps, that Fortuna directs tragedy in another direction. While Raymond is objectified under the sadistic gaze of the narrator, it is the narrator's sister who suffers most brutally through the power of masculine spectatorship. Connie will become the target of the narrator's desires, as he seeks knowledge of the female body by subjecting her to his violating gaze and body.

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of society's morals (Janik 20). Arlecchino is another name for a clown or harlequin character of Italian comedy (OED). According to David C. McClelland, "Harlequin is definitely connected with such stark underworld figures as Dr. Faustus, Pluto, and sorcerers" (97).

The pleasure experienced in witnessing the pain and suffering of others, known in German as *Schadenfreude*, accurately applies to the narrator's perverse enjoyment in witnessing the anguish, defeat, and suffering of the people around him, including his sister and his friend and rival, Raymond. It is ambiguous whether or not McEwan means to imply sexual satisfaction in the narrator's act of watching Raymond and other boys, the losers of the race, stagger to the finish line in arduous and futile efforts, although the "fulsome abandonment" that the narrator experiences as a spectator of the race does invoke an almost orgasmic release. In watching Raymond compete in the cross-country race, the narrator's pleasure is derived in part from this "fulsome abandonment . . . of the cosmic life process – the Logos," which he experiences cathartically through the futility of Raymond's efforts (20). The term "Logos" carries different connotations in religious, linguistic, and metaphysical discourses: it can mean Jesus Christ in Christian theology, or "word" or "reason" in Greek philosophy (OED). In this story, Logos as the principle of reason is contrasted with the narrator's abandonment of morality and rationality in single-minded pursuit of his goal of sexual conquest; by abandoning Logos, the narrator rejects the established moral principles of society. This nihilistic rejection encompasses his disregard for the law, his disrespectful attitude towards his father and the working-class men of his community, as well as his general hostility directed towards women and feminized Others. By abandoning Logos, the narrator situates himself outside of social institutions of law, family, religion, and the working world. In this way, critic Dominic Head characterizes the narrator of "Homemade" as "symptomatic of an era where the connection between 'Word' and world is indistinct, where it no longer seems possible 'to unify the complex totality of organic evolution and human purpose'" (40). Head argues that the narrator represents a society that is morally sick, in which people experience a lack of meaning or purpose in life.

While in partial agreement with Head, I read the narrator's symptomatic apathy more specifically in a context of masculine gender identity, where it is the anxieties of transitional adolescence and the transformation of a boy into a man that fuel the narrator's hysterical rejection of empathy for others. The angst associated with adolescence is a crucial determinant of the narrator's hysterical unrest. Peer pressure and conflicts of gender identity contribute to the narrator's homosocial rivalry and bond with

Raymond; specifically, it is the complex interplay of power and pleasure in the homosocial bond that makes McEwan's depiction of adolescence so darkly disturbing, such a twist of the "coming of age" motif. In a way, like Süskind, McEwan reenvision the *Bildungsroman* genre, setting it within a Gothic context of psychological disturbance and the horrors that pervade everyday existence. The subject position of adolescence is particularly suited to this darkly satirical view of social conventions, as Kieran Ryan suggests: "the dislocated gaze of the adolescent robs adult behaviour of its transparent familiarity, while forbidding any sentimental retreat into the idealization of infancy. Seeing the world through the eyes of figures who feel equally alienated from innocence and experience throws into relief assumptions that might otherwise remain invisible and unexamined" (6). As McEwan illustrates in "Homemade" and in his later work, particularly in Briony's position in *Atonement*, adolescence can be a time when certain knowledges, particularly sexual knowledge, are both desired and feared. It is sexual knowledge that is central to McEwan's depiction of masculine angst and anxiety. As the narrator describes of his adolescent burden, "I was made aware of and resented my virginity . . . the fact that I had never had it, made it, done it, was a total anathema, my malodorous albatross" (15). While his virginity is a burden and an obstacle to achieving his desired position of manhood, sexual knowledge remains "terrifyingly obscure" to him (16). The fears surrounding sexual knowledge, and particularly the female body, are intricately tied to the narrator's feelings of resentment and fuel his desire to attain manhood at whatever cost.

In this sense, the narrator's boyhood quest for sexual knowledge is also a form of conquest over the terrifying, yet desired, female body. Indeed, if he succeeds in his mission, he will conquer his fears of the unknown and obscure mysteries of sex as well as attain the desired manhood, separate from and seemingly superior to the feminized innocence of childhood. Yet to accomplish this feat, the narrator must first gain firsthand knowledge of the "Fleshly Grail" (18), that is, knowledge of the female body (genitalia). For the cost of a shilling, an expense the narrator could easily afford given his pastime of stealing and reselling books, he would be able to "pay for a glimpse at the incommunicable, the heart of mystery's mystery, the Fleshly Grail, Dinky Lulu's pussy" (18). Lulu Smith, the girl whose sexual reputation is shrouded in fantasy and folklore,



represents the mysteries of the female body in the male imagination; throughout the narrative, Lulu is referred to by a variety of names connoting her position of mystery, awe, fear, and desire in the minds of the two boys. Besides “Dinky Lulu,” a comical reference to her feared position as phallic female, she is also referred to as “Lulu Lamour,” “Lulu Slim” and “Zulu Lulu” (14). Lulu’s large body is a focus for the boys along with her “reputed sexual appetite and prowess” (14). Her body is described by its “wobbling girth and laughing piggy’s eyes, blooming thighs and dimpled finger-joints, [a] heaving, steaming leg-load of schoolgirl flesh” (14). In their fleshly presence, Lulu and also the narrator’s mother and sister are associated with an animalistic, abject vision of femininity. Reminiscent of the “piggy” appearance of Lulu, the narrator’s mother is described as “vast and grotesque, the skin hanging from her like flayed toad-hides” and his sister Connie as an “ugly bat” (16). Here, animals (pig, toad, and bat) are used to connote the feminine body as grotesque and degraded. Lulu, Connie, and the narrator’s mother are symbolically unified in his imagination, as they are shrouded by an aura of disgust. Yet, despite these feelings, the narrator also desperately desires to experience this female flesh for himself, wanting to unlock its “mysteries.” In this way, the degraded, abject Lulu is transformed into the “divine Lulu Smith” (21): her power derived solely from her possession of “cunt” (21).

For the narrator, “cunt” represents the sexual knowledge that is both feared and desired. Indeed, his desire to possess this sexual knowledge becomes an obsession that he cannot quell:

I thought about cunt. I saw it in the smile of the conductress, I heard it in the roar of the traffic, I smelt it in the fumes from the shoe polish factory, conjectured it beneath the skirts of passing housewives, felt it at my fingertips, sensed it in the air, drew it in my mind and at supper, which was toad-in-the-hole, I devoured, as in an unspeakable rite, genitalia of batter and sausage. And for all this I still did not know just what a cunt was. (21)

All of the narrator’s senses are fixed on this single obsession, and yet it remains just outside his reach. Without a female accomplice, the narrator is unable to complete his initiation into manhood; indeed, McEwan turns the paradigm of male dominance on its head, by illustrating how the transition into manhood both uses and depends on the

female body as the vessel of heterosexual masculinity. Ironically, the narrator is entirely dependent on female authority to accomplish his sexual rite of passage – ironically and tragically, because the female authority that the narrator seeks out is not the sexually experienced Lulu Smith, but rather his ten-year old sister.

In anticipation of his meeting with Lulu, the narrator's fear and anxiety lead him to perform a willful manipulation of his sister that culminates in his sexual violation of her. The narrator decides to use his sister as the source of his enlightenment into the female body; she is the one who can "[arm him] with this comfortably gained knowledge" and allow him to "face the awesome Lulu with zeal and abandon" so that "the whole terrifying ordeal would pale into insignificance" (21). McEwan draws upon the imagery of battle to describe the narrator's defensive attitude towards female sexuality. With knowledge, the narrator will be "armed" in battle with the terrifying "Zulu Lulu"; this is not only a veritable battle of the sexes, but also a battle within himself, as he must struggle to overcome his own fears, insecurities, and innocence to become his idealized version of man.

In her reading of McEwan's short story, Lynda Broughton takes up the imagery of quest / conquest to situate the narrator within the context of the male literary imagination. According to Broughton, the literary allusions made by the narrator situate his boyhood initiation into the adult world within a tradition of male (sexual) quest narratives. These allusions include references to Goethe, Dante, Shakespeare, Coleridge, Spenser, as well as Henry Miller and Havelock Ellis. Broughton writes, "The subject of the story presents himself . . . as the Romantic hero whose quest is the search for the 'fleshly grail' of adult knowledges, the last and most desirable of which is the female body" (140). The narrator describes Raymond as "my Mephistopheles, . . . my clumsy Virgil to my Dante, showing me the way to a Paradiso where he himself could not tread" (13). Drawing upon allusions to *Faust* and *Dante's Inferno* in particular, Broughton reads McEwan's narrative as exemplary of the Romantic quest tradition, seeing the male protagonist as both reproducing and ironizing the archetypal masculine hero. While in agreement with Broughton's reading of the quest / conquest motif in the story, my reading of these literary allusions suggests an additional context of male homosociality for McEwan's story.

Male homosociality also draws together McEwan's narrator with the legend of *Faust*. Faustus's damnation is the consequence of his quest, as he is dragged to hell by Mephistopheles, who also acts as his guide. According to Graham Hammill, the homosocial relationship between Mephistopheles and Faustus blurs the line between the male homosocial bond and homosexuality, where the exchange between the Faustus and Mephistopheles is a "a highly erotic economy of consumption, a barely contained homosocial economy in which the 'women' exchanged between Faustus and Mephistophilis are shown more as instruments to keep the exchange going" (329). Hammill identifies how the constructions of masculinity and the structures of exchange between men are often conduits for homoerotic desires. With regard to Dante's and Virgil's relationship, there is also indication of homoeroticism in the male homosocial bond. The intertextual references to the relationships between Dante and Virgil, as well as Faustus and Mephistopheles, point to a similar dynamic of masculine mentorship and homoeroticism as found in the relationship between the narrator and Raymond.

In both Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the element of hubris is also found in the masculine quest for knowledge. Ronald de Rooy characterizes Dante's poetic aspirations as transgressing boundaries, "pretend[ing] to be God, judging his fellow men and describing paradise and ultimately God himself" (21). In this way, Dante, like Faustus, is caught up in the arrogance of striving to be the greatest poet / scholar of his time, essentially trying to surpass God in this ambition. Although McEwan's narrator is not searching for omnipotence in his quest for the "fleshy grail," he does commit a transgression of boundaries when he commits incest with his sister. For both Faustus and Dante, their journeys lead them into an underworld of sin and of knowledge. "Homemade" follows this pattern, when the narrator is guided by Raymond into a world of forbidden pleasures and vices. He ends up crossing the threshold separating a man from the abject, monstrous, and malevolent aspects of human nature. Once this boundary is crossed, there is no turning back; like Faustus, he is willing to give up everything in search of this forbidden knowledge.

For McEwan's narrator, this point of no return occurs in the moment he decides to rape his sister. He describes the moment as a physical transformation: "the blood having drained from brain to groin, literally, one might say, from sense to sensibility, . . . I had

decided to rape my sister” (23). Of the many literary allusions in the story, this is the only reference to the work of a female author, Jane Austen. The use of Austen’s title to describe his sexual desire is ironic and disturbing in its comical treatment of the severity of the situation; indeed, throughout the story, the intellectualizing narrator seems to show little remorse for the violence he has committed, often emphasizing the comedic aspects of the situation. Again, by suggesting that his decision to rape his sister was motivated by his sexual impulse and bodily drives, the narrator also tries to diminish the wickedness of his actions. In a way, he attempts to situate his actions as a “crime of passion” or as a natural behaviour, a “boys will be boys” rationalization, rather than as a premeditated plotting of his sister’s abuse. This form of justification for rape is not uncommon for sexual offenders<sup>35</sup>; however, as argued by feminist critics like Susan Brownmiller, this form of justification should be disregarded, for it diminishes how men systematically use rape as a “vehicle of . . . victorious conquest over [women’s] being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood” (5). In this feminist understanding of sexual violence, rape is a signifying act used to incite fear in women and prove male dominance. It is an assertion of power over another, and not an act of desire, love, or sexual longing. Indeed, the narrator follows this pattern of proving his power and manliness by manipulating his sister into a sexualized version of her favourite game of “Mummies and Daddies.” It is through this seemingly innocuous game, in its mimicry of adult relationships, that Connie is violated.

The game of “Mummies and Daddies” seems harmless; the narrator describes it as “the microcosm of the dreary, everyday, ponderous banalities, the horrifying, niggling details of the life of our parents and their friends, the life that Connie so dearly wanted to ape” (24). However, implicit within this game is the acting out of an Oedipal drama, where brother and sister take up the social-sexual roles of their parents. As his sister becomes the “Mummie,” she immediately becomes a sexually viable partner for the narrator in his mimicry of the “Daddie” role. His sexual desires are directed towards her

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<sup>35</sup> The Rape Victim Advocates organization addresses prevalent myths about rape, including the perception that it is a crime of passion, rather than a premeditated attempt to dominate, humiliate, and punish the victim. More information is available at: <http://www.rapevictimadvocates.org/myths.asp>.

during this game, as Connie is transformed into “something more than a sister” (21). The role-playing game allows each of the two children to engage in their fantasy scenarios: for Connie, it is the fantasy of being the happy housewife; for the narrator, it is a more sinister, sexual fantasy of rape and conquest. An element of violence is never far from the game. At one point, Connie throws something at her brother with “unthinking vigour” and he reciprocates this violence by “kick[ing] her shins” (23). While sibling rivalry is commonly displayed in these ways, in the dramatic tension created by the narrator’s intention to rape her, these violent gestures are shadowed by his sadism and desire for power.

At first, the game not only makes Connie happy, but also empowers her: “She was the inter-galactic-earth-goddess-housewife, she owned and controlled all around her, she saw all, she knew all, she told me when to go out, when to come in, which room I was in, what to say, how and when to say it” (25). Within this imaginary scenario of domesticity, Connie possesses an almost omnipotent control over her brother. In this way, Connie’s game inverts the patriarchal structure of power, as she takes on a position of dominance and authority in her role as Woman-Mother. Indeed, as Lynda Broughton argues, Connie assumes in this moment of play “the mythic, symbolic status of woman” (140) within the home. Like Lulu Smith and the narrator’s mother, Connie becomes the embodiment of the mysteries of female sexuality, and in this sense, she holds a certain power of intrigue over the narrator. Like Lulu Smith, she possesses the desired and feared “cunt”: the Pandora’s box or the “fleshly grail,” and all the mysteries of sexuality it will reveal when unlocked. In her mythic status as Woman, Connie also takes up a symbolic or imaginary wholeness and totality: “She was happy. She was complete. I have never seen another human so complete” (25). Contrary to the narrator in his sense of castration, his sister appears to possess everything that he does not; where he lacks confidence, Connie is complete, even divine in her authority over sexuality within the fantasy game-play.

Connie’s transformation, in her brother’s mind, from degraded, “ugly bat” to desirable, powerful Woman, illustrates the contradictions of the feminine in the patriarchal imaginary. The juxtaposition of female as divine object and female as degraded object reinforces the construction of female alterity and objectification. Indeed,

the narrator begins to have fantasies about his sister as “a beautiful young lady, a film star maybe” (21). This fantasy of ideal femininity can be viewed within the context of Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze. As Mulvey explains, in the context of cinematic representation

the woman, as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified. The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: . . . investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery . . . or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence over-valuation, the cult of the female star). (14)

Within their fantasy role-playing, Connie becomes symbolically tied to both the threatening and the desirable aspects of iconic femininity; she is both fetishized as a sexual object, “a film star, maybe,” and feared as a castrating, phallic female, who laughs at his sexual inadequacy and takes control. To overcome this fear, McEwan’s narrator seeks to “investigate” and “demystify” his sister’s femininity by conquering her sexually. In this sense, rape reveals a psychological conflict deeply rooted in masculine subjectivity: by raping his sister, he conquers the female Other.

The scopophilic quality of the narrator’s desire is once again made clear in his direct attempt to view his sister’s genitalia; this act will allow him to gain mastery of her body by acquiring sexual knowledge. In Freudian theory, scopophilia is situated within the sadistic-anal phase of infantile development (“The Sexual Life of Human Beings”). In this phase, the infant is driven by “an instinct for mastery which easily passes over into cruelty . . . [T]he instincts for looking and for gaining knowledge [the scopophilic and epistemophilic instincts] are powerfully at work” (327). In this description, Freud highlights the power / knowledge dynamic functioning in the impulse towards mastery. Notably, Freud characterized the sadistic-anal phase as “the immediate forerunner of the phase of genital primacy” (“The Development of the Libido” 327), wherein the male subject experiences the Oedipal complex, the crisis of castration anxiety marked by an incestuous desire for the mother and rivalry with the father (“Archaic and Infantile Features” 207). The narrator’s quest for mastery leads him to commit incest in search of sexual power / knowledge, which in turn solidifies, in his mind, his attainment of

manhood; yet in doing so, the narrator breaks the incest taboo, raping his sister during the game of “Mummies and Daddies” in a disturbing perversion of Freud’s model of normal childhood development. In a Gothic twist of the *Bildungsroman*, the peer pressures of male homosociality and his obsession with attaining the patriarchal ideal of masculinity impel this boy to transgress the sexual and social taboos of society, leading him into perversity and monstrosity.

The game-playing between brother and sister takes a sinister turn when the narrator tries to convince Connie that the most important thing that grown-ups do is to “fuck” and that her game of “Mummies and Daddies” should mimic this activity as well. Yet in this moment, he feels a twinge of remorse for manipulating and plotting his sister’s violation in this way: “It was almost a shame I had it in mind to rape her” (25). This moment of remorse in the narrator does not detract from his disgraceful actions, however, as he qualifies that it “was almost” a shame, suggesting that he does not fully regret what occurred. Connie follows her brother’s lead in their imaginary role-playing and allows him to undress her and lie on top of her. During this seduction, however, McEwan undermines the phallic persona of his narrator by emasculating him at every opportunity. The narrator portrays himself as bumbling, pathetic, and a failure in his sexual attempts. From his crude explanation of sex to his lack of finesse in penetrating Connie’s “tight, resisting skin,” the narrator’s innocence and incompetence is readily apparent (27). After explaining to Connie how they will get a “nice feeling” from sex, he fails to follow through on his promise. Connie’s reaction of “boredom” and her repetition that “I’m not getting any feeling” not only satirizes the “manly position” that the narrator attempts to gain but also undermines the genre of male sexual conquest narratives, such as those authored by Henry Miller, mentioned earlier by the narrator as an authority in his sexual education (16). In an interview with Ian Hamilton, McEwan addresses this model of masculine narration, when he describes his narrator as “Henry Miller-ish” (10). This likeness between the authorship of Henry Miller and that of McEwan’s narrator suggests a perspective of mature reflection on youthful exploits, but McEwan also provides a satirical view of masculine bravado. Peter Childs suggests that Henry Miller represents a specific type of male author, one who is “deeply concerned with masculinity and

sexuality” (11). McEwan satirizes this type of male authority by conveying his male narrator as callous and pathetic in his conquest of female flesh.

McEwan undermines this “macho” position throughout the rape and seduction episode. At one point, Connie even bursts out in laughter at the sight of her brother’s erect penis, mocking the phallus as the imagined source of power and mastery: “So silly, it looks so silly” (28). This mockery captures McEwan’s subversive take on masculine self-fashioning. He literally strips the masculinity of the narrator down to its abject core, until all that is left is a “lonely detumescent blankness, [the boy] numbed by this final humiliation” (28). Indeed, as Connie subjects her brother’s sexuality to her critical, ridiculing gaze, there is a reversal of power and breakdown of masculine self-definition.

Connie’s laughter indicates her brother’s inadequacy, while also reflecting a subversive feminine power that threatens the masculine symbolic order. In feminist theory, particularly in Hélène Cixous’s “The Laugh of the Medusa,” the image of female laughter, particularly the Medusa laughing, represents a distinctly feminine creativity and pleasure. Notably, the Medusa figure has also been symbolically linked to female genitalia.<sup>36</sup> When Connie laughs at her brother, it is not just to humiliate him, but also to express her own agency as a sexual subject. Her ascent to sexual authority culminates when she tells her brother, “‘I know where it goes,’ . . . ‘I know where the hole is’” (28). Her knowledge of the female body enables her brother to fulfill his sexual ambitions: “she was at Mummies and Daddies and controlling the game again. With her hand she guided me into her tight, dry little-girl’s cunt” (28). Like Raymond who guides the narrator into the joys of adult vices, Connie leads her brother through this rite of sexual initiation. With this final irony, Connie is conveyed as initiating her own incestuous rape.

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<sup>36</sup> Freud linked the Medusa figure to female genitalia and the fear of castration. In his essay, “Medusa’s Head,” he describes the decapitated Medusa’s head as a symbol of castration: “To decapitate = to castrate. The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something” (84). The importance of sight to castration anxiety is reinforced within McEwan’s story, in particular with the boy’s sight of his sister’s genitals. In her essay “Castration or Decapitation,” Cixous illustrates how the decapitation of Medusa’s head is a symbolic silencing or denial of feminine power that is tied to masculine castration anxiety. In this regard, the boy’s castration anxiety and fears of inadequacy have the direct consequence of undermining his sister’s bodily integrity, her autonomy and power.



McEwan's narrator does not specify how or from whom Connie has learned this adult knowledge of sexuality, but this implication of her complicity is a disturbing detail that further deepens the profound betrayal of trust between brother and sister. Indeed, the narrator seems to imply that his sister was asking for it, a claim so often made against victims of rape. This diversion of blame onto Connie is also a means to avoid feeling guilt and shame for his actions.

Having literally and figuratively penetrated the mysteries of the female body, the boy feels a triumphant pride in his accomplishment, even as the older narrator admits it was "one of the most desolate couplings known to copulating mankind" (28). His masculinity is restored from abject castration to a "manly position" (29), even though it is little more than a "splendorous pose" (29). So proud is the narrator in his sexual conquest that he wishes there were others to witness the act: "I wished Raymond could have seen me. . . I wished Dinky Lulu could have seen me, in fact if my wishes had been granted I would have had all my friends, all the people I knew, file through the bedroom to catch me in my splendorous pose" (28-29). Again, the homosocial desire to have Raymond and his peers' approval shows that the social construction of masculine power and identity takes place under the regime of male spectatorship. As a "pose" or "position," the narrator's masculinity is shown to be a performance. For the boy, committing this incestuous sexual violation of his sister is solely a way of proving his masculinity and nothing more. As he expresses, "I felt proud, proud to be fucking, even if it were only Connie, my ten-year-old sister, even if it had been a crippled mountain goat I would have been proud to be lying there in that manly position" (29). However, his sexual conquest is undermined when he reaches orgasm in a "miserable, played-out, barely pleasurable way" while Connie is asleep (43). In this way, McEwan undermines the triumphant sexual conquest narrative by illustrating the anticlimactic finish of a pathetic rape scenario. The adult narrator looking back at his first sexual experience is derisive of the pride he felt after completing this disturbing rite of passage. While disparaging of his younger self, the adult narrator does not seem to acknowledge the severity of his actions; rather, the episode is recalled as a befuddled sexual conquest and not a traumatic act of rape. There remains a lack of moral integrity in the narrator or at the very least, a moral ambiguity that is disturbing.

Although the boy feels pride having “made it into the adult world finally” (29), McEwan makes it clear that this episode carries an unspeakable trauma for both children. Connie’s trauma is more obviously displayed as she cries in the bathroom; however, the narrator implies that the experience was also traumatic for him as well, albeit to a lesser degree. The narrator’s final thoughts confirm this reading:

. . . right then I did not want to see a naked girl, or a naked anything for a while yet. Tomorrow I would tell Raymond to forget the appointment with Lulu, unless he wanted to go it alone. And I knew for a fact that he would not want that at all.  
(29)

Clearly overwhelmed by the experience, the narrator declares that he wants nothing to do with the adult sexual world for an indefinite period of time. In this way, the experience of incestuous sex can be seen as a form of “self-abuse” for the narrator as well as an abuse of his sister’s body and trust, a point he is reluctant to make in the story’s opening paragraph: “I should really insist that this story is about Raymond and not about virginity, coitus, incest and self-abuse” (9). Indeed, a latent masochism in masculine homosociality is implied throughout the story, even if it is only at the end of this sexual episode that the narrator experiences for himself the self-destructive drive that underlies male bonding. As McEwan illustrates throughout “Homemade,” there is a sadomasochistic undercurrent in patriarchal masculinity that victimizes girls and women, but also causes men to “self-abuse” (9) through their conformity, competition, and attempts at mastery. Situated within a Gothic context, this story of the transformation of a boy becoming a man through rape is twisted into a shocking nightmare wherein the boy comes to embody a monstrous version of masculinity collapsing into abjection.

The sadistic and masochistic behaviours of the young men in McEwan’s “Homemade” can be seen as a representation of male hysteria. The narrator acts out in ways that are symptomatic of a sickness that permeates patriarchal culture. In particular, this hysteria is displayed most profoundly through the narrator’s violent, sadistic behaviours. Homosocial aggression, competitiveness, and “macho” self-fashioning as part of the performance of masculine identity mask a more complex psychological conflict. Specifically, this masculine posturing masks a fear and abjection of the female body, while denying the abject inadequacies of their own bodies. In this way, one can see

how masculinity is based on not only repeated and performed stylizations of the body (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 25), but also the psychosomatic symptoms of a gender dis-ease. The desperate desire to conform to hegemonic masculinity, and the resulting fears and anxieties about inadequacy and not fitting in, can be seen as symptoms of masculine hysteria. This dis-ease is the origin of the sadomasochistic violence in McEwan's story. The boys, Raymond and the nameless narrator, are merely the ciphers of a patriarchal system that perpetuates itself through the circulation of fear and abject desire among men. McEwan's early fiction, including his story "Homemade," illustrates how men and boys can be socialized into a destructive and self-destructive gender identity.

Indeed, each of the narratives included within this section highlights how normative qualities of hegemonic masculinity – ambition, entitlement, autonomy, – can become malevolent. The narratives of Süskind, Gaiman and McEwan shock the reader in their depictions of sexualized violence. The traumatizing quality of these Gothic narratives is a means to disturb the complacency of readers; this in turn, exposes the horrors of a patriarchal value system that symbolically ties hegemonic masculinity to pathological violence and violation of feminized Others.

## SECTION TWO

### **Haunting Regrets: Male Guilt, Complicity and PTSD in Contemporary Historical Fiction**

In the previous section, male protagonists of contemporary Gothic narratives were analyzed in relation to their feelings of entitlement, ambition, and the desire to conform to a masculine ideal, which lead them to commit monstrous sadistic acts. This pattern continues in the works discussed in this second section, where once again seemingly ordinary men are represented as perpetrators of rape and sexual violence. Yet within Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, the emphasis shifts to the personal journey of redemption undertaken by men who have committed sexual violence, who have been complicit in supporting patriarchal power structures, but who are now suffering guilt, shame, and regret over their actions. While the Gothic narratives emphasize the monstrosity latent in ordinary masculinity, the historical narratives of Lee and Coetzee humanize perpetrators by delving into the complex circumstances that create monsters out of men.

Historiography, the writing of history through narrative, is a strategy of contemporary authors who wish to emphasize "the particular and specific rather than the collective and statistical" (Stone 4). In other words, by retelling history in novels, authors are able to highlight the personal experience of historical events. According to Linda Hutcheon in her discussion of historiographic metafiction,<sup>37</sup> contemporary historical novels often add a new emphasis on what she calls the "ex-centric," that is, the perspectives of "alienated 'otherness'" (12). The subjectivities of those who are traditionally silenced or erased from the dominant culture and history are often given a voice in contemporary historiographies. By giving voice to the "ex-centric," historiographic fiction acknowledges and represents the voices of those who are

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<sup>37</sup> According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction is self-conscious in design, intertextual, and parodic of traditional "claims to historical veracity" (3). In this way, historiographic fiction functions as a reminder that "there is no one writable 'truth' about history and experience, only a series of versions" (10).

marginalized in “dominant white, male, middle-class, European culture” (12). These novels often address the gaps in history indicating the silencing of those who are marginalized on the basis of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and (dis)ability.

The narratives included in this section engage with history and its representation in such a way that both dominant and marginal perspectives are represented. Each represents the perspective of the male protagonists, who possess certain power and privileges within the dominant culture; yet within each there is also a counter-discourse of the ex-centric, marginalized Other, who represents the voices of those who are silenced and oppressed under patriarchal culture. Specifically, the female or feminized Other is portrayed in a position of subordination, victimized and silenced under the forces of patriarchy. Each author challenges the boundaries between dominant and marginal, male and female, self and Other, violator and victim by showing how the male protagonists, previously violators, are transformed by the experience of empathetic identification with the abject, female Other, when they too are forced into a position of traumatic victimization. Specifically, it is the experience of trauma that triggers in the male figures an abandonment of their beliefs in and allegiance to patriarchal power; traumatic experience is the turning point, the catalyst to change by initiating an ongoing struggle of gender identity that casts each man into a state of hysteria, of gender dis-ease.

The connection between trauma and history figures prominently in critical works such as Kaja Silverman’s *Masculinity in the Margins* and Cathy Caruth’s “Unclaimed Experience.” Silverman argues that historical traumas like war or genocide can “[bring] a large group of male subjects into such an intimate relation with lack that they . . . withdraw their belief in the dominant fiction” (55), where the “dominant fiction” is the patriarchal ideology of male power and privilege. Caruth also asserts that acts of remembering and memorializing, and in some cases repressing and reliving traumatic events can overwhelm the psyche. For Caruth, narrative plays a crucial role in contemporary historical fiction as a mode of access to those traumatized by dominant culture (“Unclaimed” 182).

The First or Great War, the Second World War, the Holocaust, the dropping of the atomic bomb, the Korean War, the war in Vietnam, the Gulf War, the events of 9/11

and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that followed – all have contributed the traumatic traces that have indelibly marked the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. In some form or another, war trauma has been and continues to be the definitive characteristic of our times, impacting our minds and bodies in ways that are still to be discovered.<sup>38</sup> While these mass traumas are indicative of the enormous scale of human atrocities, often the individual experience and the personal narrative of trauma truly reveal the irrevocable scars of history on the human psyche. Lee and Coetzee explore individual experiences of trauma, the narratives of which shed light on the horrific violence of historical events of war and colonial conquest; by drawing from a personal vision of historical wounds, these authors highlight the role of patriarchal ideologies and practices in shaping these events. In each novel, the effects of mass trauma are personalized through the embodied experience of sexual violence and its subsequent psychological disturbances. Specifically, personal sexual trauma reflects and symbolizes the large-scale violence that is experienced by marginalized groups. By drawing together mass traumas such as the World Wars, apartheid and genocide with intimate accounts of sexual violence, these authors not only put a human face on historical traumas, but also illuminate the complex ways in which politics of sex and gender in particular contribute to widespread suffering and devastation.

A central connection between history and trauma was developed by Sigmund Freud, whose work with hysteria patients uncovered a principle of deferred action, where physical and psychological symptoms are understood as reviving and indicating an earlier traumatic event. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud describes this structure of deferred action in the presence of symptoms that can be traced back to a past trauma:

A man who has experienced some frightful accident – a railway collision, for instance – leaves the scene of the event apparently uninjured. In the course of the next few weeks, however, he develops a number of severe psychical and motor

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<sup>38</sup> In *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*, Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner suggest that modern warfare, with its introduction of new technologies and weaponry “capable of destruction on a hitherto inconceivable scale” (10), seemed in part to “produce a host of dramatic and previously unseen pathologies” (10).

symptoms which can only be traced to his shock, the concussion or whatever else it was. He now has a 'traumatic neurosis.' (109)

The deferred consequences of traumatic experience are also noted in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where Freud illustrates how the nightmares of war veterans convey a “disturbed and disrupted temporality” (Whitehead 13). Specifically, Freud discusses how the nightmares of shell-shocked soldiers act as a traumatic repetition of psychically overwhelming events, in this case, the relentless gunfire and the shock of exploding shells. In Freud’s argument, through this repetition compulsion, the hysterical soldiers attempt “to master the stimulus retrospectively” (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 32) by performing a “psychical binding of traumatic impressions” (33). This repetition, exemplified through traumatic symptoms such as nightmares and flashbacks, represents an effort to actively master an experience that has not been fully assimilated into consciousness. As Cathy Caruth describes in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, “The pathology consists . . . solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (4-5). Overwhelmed by their experiences and often unable to verbalize the horrors they have witnessed, traumatized soldiers are caught in alternate forms of expression. As Herman describes in *Trauma and Recovery*, trauma survivors “often feel impelled to re-create the moment of terror, either in literal or in disguised form” (40). These hysterical reenactments have a “driven, tenacious quality” and are associated with Freud’s concept of “repetition compulsion” (41) or death drive. These trauma symptoms have their origins in an unassimilated experience, of which the horror or shock is too much to bear. As long as the traumatized subject is unable to “master” or assimilate this experience, he or she will continue to relive it, re-enact it in nightmares, flashbacks, and other post-traumatic symptoms.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Caruth’s definition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD is helpful to understand the symptoms that occur following a traumatic event: “[PTSD is] a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and

In Lee's and Coetzee's novels, each male protagonist is haunted by traumatic memories, nightmares, and flashbacks that return to a scene of sexual violence. In Lee's text, the narrator Doc Hata cannot forget his lover's rape and murder during his service with the Japanese Imperial army during the Second World War; in Coetzee's text, David Lurie cannot help but have flashbacks to the experience of his daughter's rape. At the time, neither man was able to intervene or prevent the violation from occurring. Each man experiences tremendous shame and regret over the part he played in the event. As Douglass and Vogler affirm in *Witness and Memory*, the trauma witness or bystander often takes up the responsibility of memorializing those whose lives were lost during the event. In part, this memorializing takes place through his or her acts of repetition, where "active repetition is . . . a practice made urgent by the continuous danger of forgetting" (44). To repeat actively and deliberately is thus to continue the memory of what has happened, and to invoke the lives of those who were lost or who are unable to represent themselves. Douglass and Vogler distinguish secondary traumas, including "onlooker trauma" that occurs as the effect of witnessing a traumatic event, "secondary PTSD" that results from the stress of interacting with a traumatized individual, as well as "transgenerational trauma" that affects the descendants of trauma victims (10). These secondary traumas indicate the long-lasting effects that can appear as symptoms, both psychological and somatic in nature, in individuals who are only indirectly or associatively linked to the initial traumatic event. In Lee's and Coetzee's novels, it is the inability or failure of the male protagonists to act that contributes to their "survivor guilt."<sup>40</sup> According to van der Hart and van der Kolk, those individuals who survive a

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possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event" (*Trauma* 4). Like the diagnosis of hysteria in previous centuries, the diagnosis of PTSD marks the profound ways in which trauma alters the psyche and behaviour of the survivor. In this way, one can see how trauma suspends the passage of time, in that the event continues to hold the survivor in a state of perpetual traumatic repetition or "acting out" of the past.

<sup>40</sup> As defined by George Fink, survivor guilt is "mental pain that results from the appraisal that a person has done wrong by surviving a trauma. This is because the survivor ties his or her own survival to the death of others" (555). One of the prominent features is "self-blame" that is derived from the feeling that the survivor "could have, should have, but due to selfishness did not save others, but instead only caused suffering" (556). This feeling of self-blame is enhanced "if one's usual role, such as husband,



traumatic experience often experience intense feelings of "doubt and humiliation, . . . feelings of guilt and shame" (178). These feelings can greatly obstruct the survivor's ability to move on from a trauma, to integrate the experience and accept the past.

In regards to masculine identity, the intrusion of shame and regret marks a disruption of the patriarchal model. Under patriarchy, men assume power and privilege "to dominate women, and men of lower classes and races, in a 'natural' way without self-reflection or guilt" (Valverde 165). Although guilt and shame are not in themselves enough to "bring about changes in our patterns of behaviour" (65), the presence of masculine shame and anxiety in contemporary texts illustrates the extent of gender disease, the male hysteria that develops under destructive patriarchal gender formations. Feelings of failure, inadequacy, and loss in the aftermath of trauma reflect an emasculating experience that alters the masculine subject's relation to his gender identity.

The crisis of masculinity represented in these novels cannot be viewed separately from the historical contexts of warfare, sexual violence, and genocide. In each novel, the epic scope of historical traumas is intimately realized through personal narratives of sexual trauma, where it is the witnessing of violence towards a woman that incites a breakdown of masculine gender identity. Indeed, one cannot understand the dynamics of power and violence on the grand scale of history without acknowledging how individual experiences of gendered and sexual violence figure into its constitution and its consequences. The silences, guilt and complicity that occur at both an individual and a collective level are exposed in each novel in its depiction of the horror and sadism of patriarchal ideologies of militarism and colonialism. The texts that I have included in this section illustrate how the male characters occupy an ambiguous position with regard to the circumstances of trauma; both men perpetrate sexual violence and are complicit in supporting the system of patriarchal power, yet I would argue that both men are also victims of patriarchy, experiencing guilt, shame and remorse in the aftermath of trauma.

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parent, or rescuer, was to protect those who died" (556). From Fink's definition, the gender implications of survivor guilt can also be surmised: in traditional masculine roles of husband and father, or in certain occupational positions such as soldier and medical officer, these can be seen as adding to feelings of self-blame in men following trauma.

Lee and Coetzee illustrate how some men experience history as both active participants and passive objects, both complicit in and traumatized by the power structures and ideologies responsible for widespread violence and suffering. In this way, Lee and Coetzee construct masculine characters who exhibit the feelings of alienation that certain men experience under patriarchal constraints, an alienation dramatized through the acts of witnessing, desiring, and identifying with a female Other. It is this identification of the men who witness trauma with the women who are victimized that disturbs the dynamics of patriarchal gender relations. As a consequence, the male protagonists in both Lee's and Coetzee's novels experience a crisis of masculine subjectivity that resembles the personal and political protests of male hysterics. Like the "shell-shocked" soldiers whose symptoms contain the kernel of their deep-seated trauma, the male hysterics of these contemporary texts are not only reacting to the individual experience of witnessing and experiencing crimes against humanity, but also embodying a protest against the ideologies that perpetuate these crimes.

## Chapter Four

### **“A Contagion within”: Male Hysteria and Traumatic Repetition in Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life***

War sexuality (rape) is the ultimate detachment of sexuality from reproduction and the attachment of death to sexuality. . . . It is hysterical sexuality.

(Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas* 129)

Traumatized soldiers, those who suffer from the mental and physical duress of war, represent a hysterical disturbance of gender identity that, when critically explored, can offer insights into the psychological structures of patriarchal society. The male hysteric suffers from pathological masculinity, wherein the constraints of and conformity demanded by a patriarchal system contribute to his symptoms. These wide-ranging symptoms are both mental and physical in nature, including but not limited to recurring nightmares, tremors, loss of voice, gaps in memory, dissociation or splitting, and flashbacks. The presence of these symptoms in soldiers is not solely due to the violent trauma of warfare, but also can be seen as deriving from the gender ideologies endorsed by a patriarchal-military system. Pressure to conform to dominant gender ideologies places soldiers in the harmful situation of witnessing the dissolution of their ideals. This disillusionment contributes in no small way to the mental and physical breakdowns experienced by soldiers, on and off the battlefield.

In her discussion of male hysteria, Juliet Mitchell argues that there is an under-analyzed component of sexuality in war trauma. Specifically, there appears to be a fusion of the sexual drive and the death drive, where “a person gets satisfaction from destroying and hurting either another person (sadism) or himself (masochism)” (146). In war, this hysterical fusion of death and sex is evident. Mitchell notes how a “rampant sexuality” (129) is pervasive in wartime,<sup>41</sup> a sexuality performed through “violent random

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<sup>41</sup> According to the Amnesty International website, rape is frequently used as a weapon of war, where women and girls are targets of human rights violations: rapes, abductions,

encounters, the seemingly inevitable rapes and gang rapes that accompany killing” (129). Indeed, as Mitchell argues, the frequent occurrence of rape during times of war brings focus to the sexualization of the death drive, where “[i]n certain contexts, . . . killing is raping and raping is killing” (139). War sexuality blurs the boundaries between sex and death, where the traumas of both sexual and military violence produce symptoms of PTSD in soldiers.

To explore this connection, I will use Chang-rae Lee’s novel *A Gesture Life* to illustrate how male hysteria is tied to both war sexuality (rape) and the death drive. In Lee’s novel, the protagonist and narrator, Franklin Hata or “Doc Hata” as he is referred to within his community, an elderly, Korean-born man, who has been raised by a Japanese family, carries the appearance of veneration, respect, and a sense of belonging within his adopted American home. However, within his seemingly tranquil life, Hata hides behind an innocuous persona, keeping to himself his inner discontent and traumatic past that continue to haunt him. Shadowed by the traumatic memories of his service under the Japanese Imperial army during World War II, Hata can neither escape a past replete with violent sexual oppression nor deny his persisting sense of self-estrangement. Throughout the narrative, Hata’s identity is troubled by a disturbing division between maintaining a public persona while harboring potentially subversive, private desires. At the heart of his identity conflict is his continuing desire for and identification with Kkutaeh or “K” as he refers to her, the Korean “comfort woman” who was placed under his authority during the war and whom he failed to protect from a brutal and torturous death. Part of Hata identifies with the alterity of Kkutaeh’s gendered vulnerability and Korean heritage, yet he has to repudiate and suppress this part of himself in the construction of his patriarchal identity. As a result of his traumatic witnessing of K’s victimization and his overwhelming guilt over her brutal sexual assault and death, decades later Hata is still haunted by the past. Indeed, through his compulsive repetitions, including his adoption of and problematic relationship with his Korean daughter Sunny and his continued visions

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sexual slavery, torture and forced displacement. In addition to rape and violation, there are long-lasting consequences of war rape such as “social stigmatization, the consequences on their economic, social and health rights, and the destruction of the social fabric of their communities.”

of Kkutaeh, Hata reveals a distinctively hysterical enactment of masculinity, where he is symbolically and psychologically sickened by his complicity in women's sexual oppression within a patriarchal social order. As an example of the male hysteric, Lee's protagonist illustrates how hysterical symptoms such as flashbacks and vivid fantasies mask a deeply rooted identity conflict – so much so that Hata is perpetually tormented by a death wish, desiring his own annihilation.

Hata's suppression of his war trauma also reenacts the collective silencing and shame surrounding Japan's war policies, where “as many as two hundred thousand women were tricked or abducted into slavery for sexual services for the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II” (Parker and Chew 95). Many of the 25% who survived the war continued to experience psychological and physical problems long after the war ended (97). The Japanese government's silencing of the abuses that went on during the war continued until the 1990s, when women's groups began to demand compensation and a public apology for the crimes committed against comfort women. According to George Hicks, the Japanese government took the approach that it was better to ignore or forget the past: “The past is the past, which most people prefer to forget like a bad dream. . . . The issue is best ignored for the sake of future good relations, since it can only be a source of friction” (122). Lee's protagonist echoes the strategy of the Japanese government and uses a mask of contentment to conceal a horrific abuse of power.

Male hysteria in the context of men's military involvement implies a connection between masculine gender identity, trauma, and sickness. Historians Mark Micale and Paul Lerner have discussed how gender in particular plays a central role in the development of the disorder in male soldiers. According to Micale and Lerner, on and off the battlefield the incidence of hysteria in men appears to correspond with the “unique capacity [of traumatic events] to undermine male ideals” (23). Indeed, the pressure to remain “masculine” during wartime corresponds with a vilifying of anyone who exhibits behaviours deemed “weak, selfish, and insubordinate” (22). The pejorative labeling of those men suffering hysterical symptoms as malingerers and frauds, as well as frequent accusations of homosexuality and effeminacy, indicate the enormous pressure on men to conform to masculine ideals. Yet the specific threats prevalent during times of war have

the capacity to break down these gender ideals, provoking unprecedented anxieties and fears in those serving in the military: these threats include “the threat of physical death or injury, burial alive, observation of the death of others, the anticipation of fighting, prolonged material deprivation, stress among officers ordering soldiers into battle, moral disgust at killing others, anxiety at readjusting to civilian life, and the guilt of survival” (Micale and Lerner 20). Facing these threats, male soldiers often fall victim to hysteria or what we now refer to as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the symptoms of which often include a fixation on the trauma.<sup>42</sup>

For soldiers in the Imperial army, the harsh conditions, rigid hierarchy, and socialization into a mindset of extreme violence contributed to the mental instability of many men. In *Soldiers of the Sun*, Meirion Harries describes how basic training in the Imperial army was used to socialize or “implant a lethal combination of willingness to be led and readiness to kill” in the men (482). Harries suggests that indoctrination in a patriarchal-military mentality of extreme violence and “breaking down of the recruit’s consciousness of self and sense of independent responsibility” (482) contributed to the high incidence of war crimes (480). Indeed, Harries goes so far as to suggest that the mindset of the Imperial army “bordered on psychopathy: a view of death as sublime and beautiful . . . [and] surrender as the ultimate dishonor” (481).<sup>43</sup> Recruits were obligated to follow blindly the orders of superior officers, trained to accept the possibility of violent death, and routinely abused and humiliated by senior officers (482). Under these circumstances, war crimes such as rape and torture became a normal occurrence, the result of military conditioning. Indeed, the primary purpose of Japan’s sex slave operation was “to reduce the large number of rapes committed by Japanese soldiers”

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<sup>42</sup> In his work with hysterics, Freud observed their fixation on traumatic events and suggested that “hysterics suffer primarily from reminiscences” (*Studies on Hysteria* 221). Likewise, Pierre Janet described how hysterical patients are dominated by an “idée fixe” that is split off or dissociated from consciousness (365-60).

<sup>43</sup> As described by Anthony Synnott, the samurai ideal was organized around the central idea of ritual suicide: “Nothing indicated a warrior’s disdain for the value of his own life, and his high esteem for his personal honour, his family and his community as his willingness to die – to kill himself – for the good of the whole” (29).

(Parker and Chew 95).<sup>44</sup> Adding fuel to this fire was the fact that mental illness within the Imperial army was often left untreated: “Only toward the end of the war did the military authorities acknowledge the existence of battle fatigue” (Harries 478). As Harries astutely remarks, when human feeling is degraded, as it was within the military system, this “open[s] the way to inhuman behavior” (482).

The misogyny and sexual violence enacted by the Imperial Army also reflected the status quo of Japanese patriarchal culture. The attitude was that rape and sexual abuse were a normal part of wartime experience (Hicks 114). Indeed, rape and sexual abuse were used as a “proof of manhood” within Japanese culture, particularly in the male homosocial environment of the military: “Rape . . . for the Japanese army was notorious, had much to do with boasts, challenges, and competitive virility in a male subculture” (Harries 479). As a rite of passage for young Japanese men, the military experience brought with it an ideology of sexual violence, which carried over from a more general social attitude expecting female subordination. In Japanese culture, there was a “generally demeaning attitude towards women” (Harries 479). Indeed, given this attitude, to be a proper Japanese man one had to display a sense of superiority and dominance over women through sexual conquest, or be dishonored. This was particularly true with regard to racialized women, such as those from other Asian countries like Korea or China; notions of ethnic superiority often added to the extent and brutality of Japan’s sexually violent war crimes.

Lee’s depiction of Hata’s military service represents the personal effects of the wartime traumas incurred under the patriarchal regime of Imperial Japan during the Second World War. By witnessing the crimes committed against comfort women, including Kkutaeh, the woman with whom he falls in love, Hata suffers the unrest of a man divided between his sense of duty and his personal feelings. Kkutaeh’s loss

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<sup>44</sup> The “Rape of Nanjing” was especially atrocious: Japanese soldiers invaded Nanjing, China, and “systematically slaughtered more than 300,000 Chinese men, women and children and raped more than 20,000 women” (Parker and Chew 149). The Manila massacre also involved mass rapes and genocide.

symbolizes more than just a lost love; she represents a homeland that he has forsaken,<sup>45</sup> an abject otherness that he denies in himself– the embodiment of victimization under a patriarchal regime – and a reminder of his own failure to act independently of that social order.

From her first arrival at Hata's military camp, Kkutaeh and her fellow comfort women disturb the orderly existence to which Hata and the other male soldiers are accustomed. Hata recalls expecting the "imminent arrival" of the women, or girls as they turn out to be, as a "most familiar modality, just one among the many thousand details and notices in a wartime camp" (163); yet their presence takes on a disruptive force, upending Hata's routine existence, and fracturing the patriarchal social order within the camp. Hata goes on to liken the girls' arrival to an "air raid" (165) that puts every man on edge. With anxieties already high in expectation of their demise, not only among the individual men themselves but also in the faltering Japanese empire, the presence of the girls carries the potential to shatter an already fragile structure.

Hata describes the instabilities of the military structure by acknowledging the building anxieties of the men: "For every man who showed no fear or hesitance, there were three or four or five others whose mettle was . . . ashamedly wan and mortal" (170). Breaking with the myths of Japanese masculinity, the "lore" of the Japanese soldier, whose "tenacity and courage . . . in the face of certain death" was legendary (170), Hata acknowledges how the men at the time were fraught with fears, anxiety, and a looming sense of their own mortality. Hata confesses that he too has shared these fears: "There

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<sup>45</sup> Like Kkutaeh, Hata is Korean-born. Hata's suppression of his Korean ethnicity can be seen in a larger historical context of Japan's conquest and colonialization of Korea. During Japan's Imperial period, Korea was made a protectorate of Japan, and officially annexed in 1910, remaining a colony of Japan from 1910-1945 (Hicks 113). With an increased need for labour, states Richard Mitchell, "the Japanese government first encouraged and then forced Koreans to come to Japan" (75). In 1942, Korean men were conscripted in the Imperial army (87). However, tension remained between the two ethnic groups. As Mitchell states, "The Japanese considered the Koreans as inferior people" (91) and often discriminated against them, even though they relied on Korean migrants to support their labour force and military efforts. Koreans were also "more affected than any other country" by the Japanese sex-slave operations during World War II. As George Hicks states, "some scholars estimate that over 70 percent of all comfort women were from Korea" (113).



was little question of the terrible hours ahead of us, and it was a startlingly real possibility that every man in the camp, every soul one looked upon, would soon be dead . . . . My dreams were wracked nightly by the burden of it” (170).

While Hata experiences nightmares, his afflictions are not isolated, but rather part of a contagion of “malaise and fear” (158) that permeates the camp. Hysteria makes itself known through telltale signs; for instance, Hata describes a soldier “who had just come in from the front, who had not a scratch on his body but could no longer see or hear or speak” (178). While hysteria is clearly apparent in this extreme example, there is indication that hysteria has permeated the everyday lives of soldiers in subtler, more insidious ways. Hata describes the symptoms of the other soldiers as well as himself: “I myself had developed a minor skin condition on the lower calves, and I was treating many others for similar irritations such as boils and scalp rashes and an unusual variety of fungal infections. It seemed the whole encampment was afflicted” (158). The symptoms of hysteria are not only physical but also psychological, as is the case with Corporal Endo, a young man who confesses to Hata his unhealthy penchant for the pornographic pictures he keeps with him. Hata observes how through the strain of war, this young man’s “besieged mind . . . [has] grown sickly and ornate” in his obsession with women (158). The nature of Endo’s symptoms included “talking to himself” in a feminine voice and mimicking the English dialogue of female starlets while recreating a cinematic scene of seduction (159). Given his mimicry of femininity, Endo is labeled as “a homosexual” by the other soldiers and is even perceived as a “threat to the other men” (158). While Hata shows concern, the other soldiers ostracize and mock Endo. The persecution of the latter exemplifies how the group identity of masculinity is threatened by abject Otherness that may exist within the corps, or within oneself.

Through Lee’s portrayal of wartime masculinity, one can determine an ideology of conformity that when scrutinized reveals a complex pathology of both fear of and desire for the Other. As conveyed in psychoanalytic, feminist, and postcolonial theories, the Other is repudiated or abjected in the constitution of selfhood. Specifically, according to Kristeva, abjection is “an operation of the psyche through which subjective and group identity are constituted by excluding anything that threatens one’s own (or one’s group’s) borders” (Oliver). In this way, masculine subjectivity and patriarchal culture are

constituted by the repudiation, exclusion, and containment of threatening female or feminized Others (including homosexuals). Arguably, this process of identity construction may be destabilized if the masculine subject recognizes his likeness in or identifies with the abject Other. This recognition of likeness will subsequently undermine identity structures, such that the masculine subject may see himself as Other and abject. It is this central conflict of identification with the abject Other that underlies Hata's hysteria through his subversive relationships with both Endo and Kkutaeh.

Endo's hysteria centers on his mimicry of and identification with a female Other. Almost immediately after watching the girls arrive at the camp, Endo's "sickness" takes a surprising turn. Instead of the anticipation shown by the other men who await their turn with the girls, Endo feels only anxiety and dread. Indeed, he recognizes himself as "sick" in comparison with the other men: "I do in fact feel sick . . . I don't want my lot anymore" (168). Endo's "lot" is literally a piece of paper that determines the order in which he shall be able to visit the girls; yet, in more symbolic terms, his "lot" is his fate in the war, which more and more reveals "the surer truth . . . of our demise" (170). The correlation between sex and death is apparent to Endo, who anticipates and fears both. Much as Hata will strongly identify with Kkutaeh, Corporal Endo feels a particular bond with another one of the comfort women, who is in fact Kkutaeh's sister. Seeing this girl crying, naked, and "dragg[ed] [like] a skinned billy goat or calf" (173) by their superior officer, Endo takes action. The next day, he grabs her, takes her into the woods and kills her. The girl's death is seen by Kkutaeh as a mercy killing that spares her sister a fate worse than death by releasing her from her servitude as a sexual slave (238). Hata understands Endo's rebellious actions, even though he takes a stance of "disinterested spectator" when the events unfold (187). Specifically, Hata recognizes in Endo a "man who has seen his other self" (188). This identification of the male soldier with the female sexual slave illuminates how the patriarchy perpetuates itself through relations of degradation, exclusion, and hierarchy. For men like Endo, who do not necessarily conform to the patriarchal status quo and are treated in a dehumanized manner, there is a commonality of victimization with abject female Others. As a result of his actions, Endo is executed for insubordination. His identification with the female sexual slave is parallel

to Hata's relationship with Kkutaeh; yet Endo takes deliberate action in releasing the girl from a fate worse than death whereas Hata chooses a path of patriarchal conformity.

The treatment of the "comfort women" as property of the corps signifies their objectification in the patriarchal system. Although the sexual service of the "comfort women" is seemingly handled in an orderly fashion, with visitations allotted to men according to their military rank, the very presence of the girls in the camp escalates the tension among the already agitated men. The fact that there are only five girls allotted to a camp of "nearly two hundred men" (165) and that their services were obtained through deception and coercion<sup>46</sup> does not cross the thoughts of any of the men, for whom they are "nothing, or less than nothing" (250). Indeed, the girls are treated as if they were animals, kept in small compartments and "crudely referred to" as "*chosen-pi*, a base anatomical slur which also denoted . . . Koreanness" (251). Hata, too, shares in this attitude, as he sees the girls "only as parts of the larger mechanism of his living, the steady machine that grinds along each night and day" (251). The abjection of these women is engrained in the patriarchal-military system, which functions through a hierarchical ranking: "In this schema the commander had his level, the officers theirs, the enlisted men and others yet another, and so on and so forth, until it came to the girls, who had their own. All this was inviolable, like any set of natural laws" (227). This "natural" order of power and privilege is upheld and constructed through the victimization of others: in particular, those who show vulnerability and alterity. Like Corporal Endo before him, Hata feels the pressure to conform to the patriarchal order of the military encampment or else be labeled and punished as weak.

Almost immediately after her arrival, Kkutaeh shares with Hata a moment of connection that is derived from their kinship as both being Korean-born. Adopted by a Japanese family, Hata recalls how his ethnic identity as a Korean has been repressed: "I'd had [a Korean name] at birth, naturally, but it was never used by anyone, including my real parents, who, it must be said, wished as much as I that I become wholly and thoroughly Japanese" (235). Little information is given about Hata's birth parents except

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<sup>46</sup> Comfort women were often forced into prostitution by means of abduction. Japanese soldiers would abduct girls and women "from home, work or while walking in the street" (Tanaka 49).

the fact that they were working-class “tanners” who surrendered their son to a “children’s authority” to be adopted by a Japanese family (235-36). Throughout the novel, Hata does not reveal what his Korean birth name is, which suggests a conscious effort to repress that part of his life. While Kkutaeh grew up in a wealthy family in contrast to Hata’s working-class origin, their shared ethnicity and in particular their shared language create an instant bond between the two. In noting the disparity of class between Kkutaeh’s “noble, scholarly” (257) family and Hata’s modest, working-class origins, Lee highlights how the inequalities of gender have shaped each of their lives. As a girl, Kkutaeh has been considered to be not as valuable as a man; indeed, she is given up by her parents in exchange for releasing her brother from military service, a decision that seals her fate as a sexual slave for the Japanese army. Kkutaeh’s name<sup>47</sup> also reinforces this gender inequality, as it literally translates to “bottom, or last” (173); she reveals that she is “one of four unwanted daughters,” treated with cold indifference by her father. Like Kkutaeh’s brother, Hata will also be privileged for being male, as exemplified by his adoption into a Japanese family who “had provided me with every advantage and opportunity they could muster” (244). Kkutaeh is thus shown to be a sacrifice, forced to give up both her body and her life for the sake of the military “machine.”

While Kkutaeh wishes for a completely different life, she also recognizes the reality of her dire situation; in particular, she sees how the only escape from her current situation is death. Thus she implores Hata as a friend to help her escape her desperate situation: “I only ask that you give me something now . . . so I won’t wake up again” (254). Kkutaeh’s death wish requires Hata to be realized. Yet Hata’s desire for Kkutaeh and sense of duty to the patriarchal order of the military camp prevent him from helping her escape through death. His obligation to follow the status quo is strengthened by his identification with and duty to follow his superior officer, Captain Ono, a man who holds Hata in low regard.

Captain Ono is both rival of and mentor for Hata; while Ono admires the doctor and chooses him as “a model for my future career” (179) the disparity of authority

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<sup>47</sup> Kkutaeh’s name also carries echoes of the English word “cunt,” which has been used for centuries as a derogatory and debasing term for female genitalia, and the word “cut,” which foreshadows the circumstances of Kkutaeh’s death.

between the men also fuels Hata's growing resentment towards his mentor. Ono often teases Hata for his youthful naivety, causing him to feel "anger and shame" (178). This element of the rivalry between the men is exacerbated by the presence of the comfort women. Once the comfort women arrive at the camp, Ono and Hata will vie for control over Kkutaeh's fate. In this way, Lee portrays the competition between the two men as a classic homosocial relationship. In the homosocial arrangement, two male rivals compete for the love of a woman; both exemplify desire and hatred for the competitor (Sedgwick, *Between* 181). In this relationship, men may identify with and even desire to be their rival. Such is true in Lee's novel: a direct identification develops between Ono and Hata, where Ono is represented as Hata's "partner and . . . twin, [his] longtime synchronist" (298). As Mitchell outlines in *Mad Men and Medusas*, male hysteria is often apparent in homosocial rivalries. Specifically, Mitchell suggests that hysteria is sometimes the result of a rivalry between men for sole possession of the desired object (318). This rivalry is compounded within a military-patriarchal structure, where disparities of power are readily apparent between men. As a senior officer and doctor, Ono occupies a position that Hata clearly desires to attain. Yet as long as he adheres to the "larger mechanism . . . the steady machine" (251) of patriarchal rule, Hata is obliged to obey Captain Ono's orders and subjugate himself to Ono's authority.

In this way, Hata's conflict is centered on his desire for and identification with Ono, the model of patriarchal masculinity, and at the same time his desire for and identification with Kkutaeh, the female Other, with whom he feels an intense connection. This internal conflict can be perceived through Hata's hysterical performance of doublespeak,<sup>48</sup> that is, the false mimicry and empty gestures through which he adheres to the military order. Both Kkutaeh and Captain Ono recognize Hata's false or "hysterical" duplicity. Kkutaeh challenges Hata's doublespeak when he refuses to go against Ono's orders and suppresses his feelings for her: "You don't have to speak like that, Jiro. I

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<sup>48</sup> Judith Herman uses the term "doublethink" to describe one symptom of PTSD, a term she derives from the Orwellian term "doublethink," "the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them" (Orwell qtd. by Herman 87). Herman applies the idea of doublethink to hysteria, where dissociation and other "mental manoeuvres" are used to suppress traumatic memories.

know you don't believe only what you say. You're not just being a dutiful medical officer" (255). Kkutaeh is able to see beyond his words to the feelings that he is repressing. At this point, he has already spoken to her of his desire to meet her one day after the war so that they may continue their relationship; the fact that she addresses him by his first name "Jiro" suggests a level of familiarity that undermines his performance. Yet Hata continues to struggle between his sense of duty and his feelings for Kkutaeh, unable to even consider disobeying the "narrow, severe visage" (255) of Captain Ono. Ono represents an almost paternal law to honor and obey the hierarchy and duties of the military. Hata would be crossing this order if he were to help Kkutaeh escape her servitude.<sup>49</sup>

Hata will eventually confront Ono about his love for Kkutaeh, and declare his intention to marry her after the war. However, this declaration occurs only after Hata has "taken" Kkutaeh, in what is decidedly an act of rape. Hata's sexual violence is enacted under the façade of masculine gallantry but erases Kkutaeh's subjectivity. Indeed, in recollection of the rape, Hata emphasizes how "swift and natural, as chaste as it ever could be" having sex with Kkutaeh was, all the while ignoring signs of her resistance (260): "She was sleeping, or pretending to sleep, or somehow forcing herself to, and she did not move or speak or make anything but the shallowest of breaths, even as I was casting upon her" (260). Only after Hata's sexual conquest is complete and he leaves her alone in her room, does Kkutaeh break down in a flood of emotion. Hata cannot understand why she is upset and misreads her sadness as a sign that she is mourning "the end of her maidenhood" (261). Hata's concern for Kkutaeh's "maidenhood," which he believes to be the "most precious ore of any woman" (261), speaks for his conventionality when it comes to gender roles and ideals. Indeed, Hata thinks of himself as Kkutaeh's protector (293), a position that signifies his entitlement over her body as the proving ground of his masculine prowess.

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<sup>49</sup> Ono's position as both rival and "father" figure recalls the Oedipal scenario through which the son attains both his social position and gender identity within the symbolic order. The Oedipal son is a rival to his father in competition for the woman-mother's love. As the Oedipal myth suggests, to cross the boundaries of paternal law is to risk being castrated: the man scarred and blinded by his own transgression of the father's law.

Indeed, Hata's intense romantic feelings toward Kkutaeh are driven by his desire to possess her in both senses of the word. The fact that his immediate action following the rape is to promise her marriage and demand that she be released from having to provide sexual service to the other men is telling of Hata's possessiveness. As critic Young Oak Lee suggests, Hata's "possessive male ego" is obsessed with an "ideology about gender that associates a girl's purity and integrity with her virginity" ("Gender" 151). Most important to Hata is that Kkutaeh's virginity is intact before their first sexual encounter, and that she remains in his possession. In fact, Hata claims that he would rather Kkutaeh be dead than have "anyone else having her" (296). His sense of entitlement and possession is purely patriarchal.

Anne Anlin Cheng notes how Hata uses the rhetoric of romance and gallantry to justify his sexual conquest; he uses "the universalizing language of romance [to] authoriz[e] forms of violence and domination" (561). Specifically, Cheng is alluding to Hata's declaration of love and intention to marry Kkutaeh as a means to justify his rape of her. Hata's rhetoric indicates his entrenchment in the gender roles and ideologies of patriarchal society, where women are valued as sexual objects and men are the protectors of and rivals for possession of a woman's virginity. The use of the term "maidenhood" seems to connect Hata's sense of self with masculine myths of knights and chivalry; indeed, it is this self-delusion that Captain Ono challenges when he ridicules Hata's intentions to marry Kkutaeh: "What do you think you are doing, protecting her honor? I suppose you imagine she's your maiden, and you her swordsman" (269). Ono goes even further to challenge Hata's chivalry, when he tells him that Kkutaeh is pregnant with another man's child. This information, while completely false, has the power to disillusion Hata's beliefs about Kkutaeh's sexual innocence, and his own sense of entitlement to her virginity.

While Hata's approach to sexuality is colored by his idealistic fantasies of feminine purity and masculine chivalry, there is no doubt that his rape of Kkutaeh is an act of debasement and abuse. As Hamilton Carroll argues, Hata's violence towards Kkutaeh is a reflection of his own conflicts about race and gender. His rape of Kkutaeh is linked "to his own attempts to cast off his own marginal ethnic status and become wholly Japanese or later, wholly American" (604). I would add to Carroll's reading of the text

that Hata's rape is also an attempt to erase and repudiate his own feelings of powerlessness and emasculation in the face of patriarchal authority as well as his fears of an imminent death. As well, Carroll argues that Hata reduces and erases Kkutaeh's subjectivity through the rape, which in turn abjects both her femininity and her Koreanness. Kkutaeh's "silent acquiescence" is evidence of Hata's "evacuation of K's subjectivity" (261). Indeed, the fact that Hata likens Kkutaeh to a sculpture reinforces this point: "she lay as if she were the sculpture of a recumbent girl and not a real girl at all" (260). As an object and "not a real girl," Kkutaeh is effectively stripped of her humanity; she is at once idealized and re-enslaved through Hata's actions. Hata's shortening of her name to "K" reiterates this subjugation, as a literal representation of her diminishment and his power over her.

Hata will also subject Kkutaeh to a second rape following his confrontation with Ono, where he is beaten by Ono and told that Kkutaeh may in fact be pregnant with another man's child. Kkutaeh denies the truth of the rumor, yet Hata is skeptical. Hata scrutinizes Kkutaeh's body, subjecting her to his medical gaze. Once she bares her body for him to examine, Hata loses control of himself:

She did not hold me but she did not push me away. I never meant for this but I could no longer balk, or control myself, and then something inside her collapsed, snapped clean, giving way like some storm-sieged roof, and then I descended upon her, and I searched her, every lighted and darkened corner, and every room. (295)

The image of Hata as a kind of powerful natural disaster that devastates and penetrates every part of Kkutaeh's body conveys his violent response to her body and sexuality. He "searches" her, wanting to uncover the mysteries of her sex and the truth about her rumored pregnancy, yet in doing so, he has himself become a violent, deplorable interloper. Given Hata's adherence to gender propriety, he is undoubtedly shaken by the suggestion that Kkutaeh has been unfaithful, that she has all along been "mastered" by another man (270). Hata's rape of Kkutaeh is the desperate act of a hysterical man. The fact that Hata feels himself to be no longer in control of his actions and powerless in response to seeing Kkutaeh's body emphasizes how his masculine identity has been compromised by the threat of female sexuality.



Sexuality and violence become one and the same impulse for Hata, as long as his gender identity is defined by the patriarchal order. As explained by Kimmel, men who rape are often caught within a cycle of “powerlessness and entitlement” (190). Specifically, men experience female sexuality as a threat: “Women’s beauty . . . invades men’s thoughts, elicits feelings of desire and longing against their will, makes men feel helpless, powerless, vulnerable. . . . These feelings of powerlessness, coupled with the sense of entitlement to women’s bodies . . . provide a potent mix” (Kimmel 190). Within the belief that men are the protectors and are entitled to female virginity, there is a strong fear and resentment of the promiscuous woman. As Lee exemplifies in his novel, men who try to uphold these gender norms can easily cross the fragile boundary separating idealized conventions of manhood with violent sexual perpetration. Such is the case with Hata, who feels himself equally capable of rescuing Kkutaeh from servitude and subjecting her to his own violent form of possession and protection.

Kkutaeh will eventually confront Hata about his feelings, suggesting that he too is complicit in her exploitation and oppression. Specifically, she will claim that all along, Hata’s notion of romantic love has been nothing but a license for sexual conquest: “You think you love me . . . But I will tell you now, it is my sex. The thing of my sex. If you could cut it from me and keep it with you like a pelt or favorite stone, that would be all. . . . You are a decent man, Lieutenant, but really you are not any different from the rest” (300). Throughout Hata’s “courting” of Kkutaeh, he has been blind to his own oppressive presence in her life. She forces him to acknowledge that he too is guilty of objectifying her as a “thing” that can be possessed by him. The likening of her sexuality to an animal “pelt” reiterates the abjection of women in patriarchy. Whether he realizes it or not, Hata has directly participated in Kkutaeh’s objectification. Kkutaeh recognizes how Hata’s conformity to gender codes and his unwillingness to treat her as anything but an idealized fantasy prevent him from seeing her as a completely autonomous human being.

While Hata believes that he loves Kkutaeh, the only way that he has expressed his feelings for her is through violent and violating sexual conquest. Indeed, recalling the first time that he had sex with Kkutaeh, Hata is struck by the intensity of his violent impulses:

I would have willingly injured another human being had she asked, or needed me to. And it unnerves me even now how particular and exacting that sensation was, how terribly pure. That a man pleased could so easily resolve himself to the whole spectrum of acts, indifferent and murderous and humane, and choose with such arbitrary will what he shall have to remember forever and forever. (260)

This passage illuminates how the young man's passion for Kkutaeh has the power to subsume reason and morality by spurring him to violent acts of retribution against those who may prevent him from possessing her. In retrospect, Hata expresses his horror at what he was capable of doing to another human; although he did not act on these impulses, Hata acknowledges how easy it could have been for him to break the social codes of conduct, much like his Corporal Endo has in his mercy killing of Kkutaeh's sister.

Hata's sadistic rage is fuelled by his feelings of entitlement to Kkutaeh and his narcissistic defense of his masculinity. Increasing the intensity of Hata's feelings for Kkutaeh is his equally intense resentment of Captain Ono. It is Captain Ono who Hata believes is the main obstacle between himself and Kkutaeh, and he invests Ono with symbolic significance. Indeed, Hata's anger towards Ono is as much about his own identity as a man as it is about his love of Kkutaeh:

For I had been quietly considering various revenges upon him, drawing up the ways I would pay him back for his diatribes and affronts . . . Had someone asked, I would have denied any such thoughts, but in the core of my heart I was tending the darkest fires. (262)

Hata's conflict brings about a hysterical splitting of self into an internal, private self and an external, public self. The revenge fantasy is not only an Oedipal scene that envisions the murder of the patriarchal father, but also a decidedly phallic one, as he imagines himself "plunging a long blade into his throat, terrorizing him not with pain so much as the fright of an instant, wholly unanticipated death" (263). The image exposes the homosocial rivalry between the two men, where Hata fantasizes about assuming an almost omnipotent power by snuffing out his rival.

The fact that Hata does not follow through on this fantasized murder suggests his anxieties and feelings of inadequacy in relation to his masculinity. In the end, he is not

willing to give up his commitment to a patriarchal structure, even for Kkutaeh. Indeed, instead of stabbing Ono with a scalpel as he imagines, Hata greets him with a salute, following the established military protocol. It is at this point that Ono challenges the strength of Hata's conviction, questioning his mettle and undermining his sense of manhood. Ono confronts Hata's mimicry of masculinity:

There is a germ of infirmity in you, which infects everything you touch or attempt. . . . You, Lieutenant, too much depend upon generous fate and gesture. There is no internal possession, no embodiment. Thus you fail in some measure always. You perennially disappoint someone like me. (266)

Ono's speech alludes to the male hysteria that underlies the military masculinity depicted within the novel. Hata's "germ of infirmity" is in fact his ambivalent allegiance to the patriarchal codes of conduct that degrade those who are vulnerable. In this way, Hata's "sickness" turns out to be the dis-ease of patriarchal conformity. At the same time, however, Ono recognizes that Hata's obedience has been feigned or performed as gestures, rather than being genuine. The disappointment that Ono expresses towards Hata is reminiscent of his fatherly role, that of the patriarch who disapproves of his son's failure to meet the expectations of masculine identity.

Another symptom of Hata's hysteria, besides his immobilizing doubleness, is the numbing that follows the trauma of witnessing Kkutaeh's abject corpse. Following the violent standoff between Ono, Hata, and Kkutaeh, where Kkutaeh kills Captain Ono, she is restrained by a group of soldiers. While Hata resumes the duties as the camp's doctor, taking over for the now deceased Captain Ono, Kkutaeh is brutally tortured, raped and murdered by the soldiers. Hata returns only to find her eviscerated body, abandoned on the ground. His reaction to the bloody scene is immediately to repress the event:

I could not smell or hear or see as I did my medic's work. I could not feel my hands as they gathered, nor could I feel the weight of such remains. . . . I could not see the figured legs and feet, the utter, blessed digitation of the hands. Nor could I see the face, the perfected cheek and brow. Its pristine sleep still unbroken, undisturbed. And I could not know what I was doing, or remember any part. (305)

Hata's memory of the horrifying discovery of Kkutaeh's body is characterized by a numbing of his senses of smell, hearing, touch, and sight, a hysterical splitting of mind and body, where the traumatic event, too overwhelming to be fully integrated into consciousness, becomes split off. While Hata suggests that he cannot "remember any part," it will become evident that Kkutaeh haunts the contemporary events of the novel (305). Hata's actions and reactions in his relationship to his adopted daughter, Sunny, can be seen as hysterical re-enactments of guilt originating in his failings with Kkutaeh.

In the contemporary events of the novel, Hata is clearly a man afflicted with a breakdown of his identity. The barriers between past and present, self and Other seem to dissolve as Hata confronts his ideological constructions of race and gender. Hata describes what it is like to feel his world crumble: "I'm not sure anymore what I see when I 'look out,' if it's real or of my own making or something in between, a widely shared fantasy of what we wish life to be and, therefore, have contrived to create" (80). He questions patriarchy, in particular the "fantasy" construction of his identity, with which he has grown disillusioned. Hata's recognition of his fantasies includes acknowledgement that he has been living a double life. For instance, he recalls swimming in his pool: "It is an unnerving thing, but when I was underneath the water, gliding in that black chill, my mind's eye suddenly seemed to carry to a perspective high above . . . I knew there was also a man in that water, amidst it all, a secret swimmer who, if he could choose, might always go silent and unseen" (24). In this out-of-body sensation, Hata's sense of himself is split. Perceiving his double, his past self, as a "secret swimmer," Hata recognizes that he has been harboring a part of himself hidden from others. Indeed, he has never spoken to anyone about his traumatic military experiences, but rather carries the burden of his past alone.

From the outside and even to his closest friends, Hata appears to be a man completely at peace within his quiet, unassuming existence. Having emigrated to the American town of Bedley Run in 1963 and lived there for over thirty years, he appears to have left his traumatic past behind him. Yet all is not what it seems with Hata, as the psychological scars of his military experience continue to haunt him. Even as he leads a seemingly ideal life, living in a beautiful home, having retired from a long, successful career in medical sales, and enjoying "an almost Oriental veneration as an elder" within

an American community (1), there is duplicity and doubt in his façade.<sup>50</sup> Hata proclaims that “everyone here knows perfectly who I am” (1), yet his words are misleading. As a narrator, he is unreliable and duplicitous, and conveys a detachment from the events he describes. As Carroll argues, Hata’s narration is “riddled with internal contradictions” and “self-deception” (592). Indeed, by presenting a vision of success, veneration, and contentment, Hata deceives himself and others into believing his façade is real; yet despite his attempts to repress any contrary feelings, his narration breaks and ruptures when he is faced with memories and relics of his past life, giving way to flashbacks, digressions, and long-repressed memories. The “doubled register” of his narrative voice (Carroll 594) is one of the most telling symptoms of his hysteria.

One of the ways in which Lee represents Hata’s hysteria is through flashbacks, which are shown to be triggered by seemingly ordinary activities. For example, the activity of swimming is part of Hata’s quotidian routine, but it also carries a symbolic meaning of plunging into the depths of his unconscious. Indeed, swimming is both a compulsive repetition of and potentially healing link to the past. As Hata describes, “the feeling sometimes is that you are not swimming in water at all, in something material and true, but rather pulling yourself blindly through a mysterious resistance whose properties are slowly revealing themselves beneath you, in flame-like roils and tendrils, the black fires of the past” (152). He struggles to move beyond his mental defenses, the “mysterious resistance” of repression that blocks his traumatic memories from fully resurfacing; yet instead of dealing with the traumatic memories in such a way that they could be integrated into his present life, he remains haunted by images and fragments of memory. The imagery of black fire and flame is reminiscent of the violence of warfare, but also implied is the figure of Kkutaeh. The “tendrils” of flame invoke an almost

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<sup>50</sup> In particular, critics like Hamilton Carroll and Young-Oak Lee have both noted how Hata’s attempt to live out the “American Dream” and achieve “assimilation, incorporation, and individual success” (Carroll 597) is hindered by latent and overt displays of racism. Although Hata chooses to ignore the racist attitudes that pervade Bedley Run, he also suppresses incidents of vandalism committed against his Medical Supply store (Chang-rae Lee 4), the mocking of his ethnicity (4), stereotypes used to demean him (95, 100) and xenophobic attitudes (133).

feminine presence, as does the colour black, which is repeatedly associated with both death and Kkutaeh.

While he is swimming, Hata enters the dark recesses of his mind, reconnecting with the hidden traumas of his past and with his “secret swimmer,” the part of himself that he represses. In the cold surround of his pool, which is painted a “dark battleship grey” (22), Hata returns to his past, to the memories of himself as a young man serving in the military. This symbolic “return of the repressed” occurs while Hata is submerged underwater in his dark grey flagstone pool, which is clearly meant to evoke a tomblike atmosphere. Indeed, there is a direct alignment between the repetitive acts of swimming and the repetitions of memory brought about by his war trauma. Swimming is a behaviour that he has carried over from his past. Specifically, when he was deployed as a soldier in Singapore and Rangoon, he would swim along the shore and “[listen] for . . . those girls who didn’t make much noise or speech . . . the fallen women” (144) who would service the “straggles of youthful soldiers” (144).

Not only does swimming reconnect him with abject women like Kkutaeh, but it also implies the repetitions of the death drive. For Hata, the activity of swimming is more than just a form of exercise; rather, it enacts a disturbing return to the past, drawing upon the death instinct. The immersion in water seems to connect Hata with a primitive desire to return to a state of inertia: “I could remain within it, silently curled up as if I were quite unborn, as yet not of this life, or of the world . . . I did not want innocence so much as I did an erasure reaching back, a pre-beginning . . . and never [to] go forward again” (290). The desired return to a time before birth is connected with the almost womblike sensation of being enveloped by water. In this way, he expresses a wish for self-annihilation or “erasure”: “[S]ome of us longtime swimmers often wish for ourselves that submerged, majestic flight, feel the near-desire to open one’s mouth and relax and let the waters rush in deep” (277). This self-destructive urge reaches its peak during the period when his adopted daughter Sunny reveals to him that she is pregnant.

Indeed, Sunny’s presence in Hata’s life resurrects all of his unresolved issues with Kkutaeh; in particular, Sunny will become the object of Hata’s emotional transference, as she is forced to take on Hata’s guilt and anxieties, all of which he once invested in Kkutaeh. He will see Sunny’s sexuality as a threat and burden to his identity. He reacts in

not only fatherly disappointment but also desire when witnessing her sexuality. He also exhibits a violent resentment of her marked racial difference as multiracial, of Korean and African descent, which is evident in his reaction to seeing his adopted daughter for the first time:

A skinny, jointy young girl, with thick, wavy black hair and dark-hued skin. I was disappointed initially; . . . [I] should have known that he or she would likely be the product of a much less dignified circumstance, a night's wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl. . . . Her hair, her skin, were there to see, self-evident, and it was obvious how some other color (or colors) ran deep within her. And perhaps it was right from that moment, the very start, that the young girl sensed my hesitance, the blighted hope in my eyes. (204)

Hata's reaction of "blighted hope" and disappointment reveals how his patriarchal expectations are a barrier to true connection and intimacy between father and daughter. His denigration of racial and class difference, and his critical disapproval of sexual impropriety, exemplify his patriarchal conformity. The understanding that Sunny is multiracial and the product of a "wanton encounter" immediately registers her deviation from Hata's ideal vision of family life. Carroll reinforces this point in his suggestion that "Sunny cannot be . . . the chaste symbol of patriarchal benevolence and domesticated normativity Hata desires" (610). As it will become evident in Hata's policing of Sunny's sexuality and surveillance of her actions, his desperate attempts to control his daughter are a reflection of his own insecurities in attempting to conform to an impossible patriarchal ideal.

When Sunny rebels against her father's ideals and authority, she disturbs the status quo. In particular, it is Sunny's sexuality that most threatens her father's patriarchal identity, as her actions may tarnish his public reputation. The threat of Sunny's sexuality engenders a violent rage in her father, as exemplified in his reaction to seeing her dance seductively for two men. The disturbing scene invokes the pathology of both voyeurism and stalking, capturing how Sunny's display of overt sexuality is the catalyst to her father's violence.<sup>51</sup> His murderous rage is directly tied to the disillusionment of his

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<sup>51</sup> In an earlier scene, Hata voyeuristically watches a couple have sex. Believing the woman to be Sunny, Hata reacts with horror and rage: "My heart flooded black, and . . . I

gender ideals. All along, he has carried an ideal of female purity and chastity: “I saw her as I believe any good father would, with pride and wonder and the most innocent (if impossible) measure of longing, an aching hope that she stay forever pristine, unsoiled” (114). His reaction to this disillusionment is violence, anger, and repudiation. It is as if he would rather she be dead or gone than disrespect him in this way, a feeling that he has exhibited to Kkutaeh in the past.

Like Kkutaeh before her, Sunny is subject to the rigid constraints of a patriarchal system: a similarity that becomes all too clear when Sunny becomes the victim of an attempted rape. The perpetrator is a drug dealer who has witnessed her seductive dance. There is the suggestion that the rape is in retaliation for her laughing “maniacally” at him and spurning his advances. Much like Kkutaeh’s experience, Sunny’s rape is the punishment for her willful display of sexual autonomy. Within a patriarchal economy of power and privilege, female sexual autonomy is undoubtedly a threat. Lee’s depiction of both Kkutaeh’s and Sunny’s experiences of rape and degradation affirms the repetition of gender violence across time and space. Carroll reinforces this point in his discussion of the historical context of female degradation on a grand scale within Lee’s novel. Specifically, Carroll connects the victimization and silencing of both Kkutaeh and Sunny to the erasure of marginalized subjects from national historiographies of Imperial countries, like Japan and the United States. In this way, the female, racialized subject is abjected in the construction of patriarchal citizenship and national identity (612).

The threat of female sexuality compromises Hata’s public reputation and undermines his authority. When Sunny reveals that she is pregnant, Hata reaches a breaking point and contemplates ending his life and Sunny’s. Hata’s disgust in hearing the rumor that Kkutaeh was pregnant is repeated. He feels an “imminent disgrace and embarrassment” (340) and insists that Sunny get an abortion despite the fact that she is near full term. Once again, history repeats itself, and Hata chooses the path of patriarchal obedience rather than allowing a woman to have control of her fate and her own body.

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wished she were nothing to me, dead or gone or disappeared, so that I might strike out at the bodies with the full force of my rage” (104).



Sunny's abortion is the turning-point of her relationship with her father, marking their separation and estrangement.

Although many years pass between the abortion and the contemporary events of the novel, Hata's guilt continues to affect him. He experiences his guilt as a perpetual death wish, an "ill-feeling" (288) most overtly displayed in his recurring visions of Kkutaeh, which have haunted him repeatedly since the end of the war. Paul Valent describes the psychological responses of survivor guilt as including the return of "poignant images . . . thoughts, ruminations, images, dreams, and flashbacks," as well as defenses of dissociation and repression. In the survivor, there are also often feelings of self-blame; the survivor feels himself or herself to be "a destroyer of life" (556). Hata reveals how some nights he will "think K has finally come back to me" (Lee 286). He describes one such episode, where he regards her figure "naked and pale, loosely enrobed in a black silken flag. . . . I was almost sure she was a spectral body or ghost" (288). In seeing Kkutaeh as a ghostly figure, Hata is like the war veterans described by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where the traumatized men "give the impression of being pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some 'daemonic' power" (64). The presence of Kkutaeh's ghost situates Lee's novel within the genre of trauma fiction.<sup>52</sup> In particular, the ghost is a return of the repressed for Hata, embodying his guilt over the part he played in her degradation and death. Hata acknowledges the sick feeling of guilt that occurs each time he envisions Kkutaeh: "each time an ill feeling comes over me, the soiling, resident sickness you develop when you have never in your life been caught at something wrong, when you have never once been discovered" (288). His fear is that his dark past will finally be revealed and his guilt will be exposed.

Unresolved guilt is the catalyst of Hata's hysterical unrest, causing him to live in a perpetual state of self-torment and isolation. Specifically, Hata feels that it is his lot in life to bring death and pain to whomever he is with and wherever he goes. This

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<sup>52</sup> In *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead discusses the ghost figure in historical novels. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy are used to illustrate how haunting in contemporary texts figures as a return of the repressed on an individual level and within a cultural context: "elements of the past which have been silenced or culturally excluded" (7) often return as ghosts in these texts.

foreboding feeling remains at the end of the novel, even after he has reconciled with Sunny. He still considers himself to be a contagion that may spread and that needs to be suppressed. The repeated motif of the black flag in relation to Hata's identity emphasizes this self-destructive drive: "Hata is, literally, 'flag,' and a 'black flag,' or *kurohata*, is the banner a village would raise by its gate in olden times to warn of a contagion within. It is the signal of spreading death" (Lee 224). Kkutaeh also wears a "black silken flag" when she appears in his vision, associating her specter, in Hata's mind, with the presence of death. Hata literally incorporates death within his identity by holding onto his adopted name of "Kurohata."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, feeling as if he is a harbinger of death, he believes that like Kkutaeh, all of his loved ones will also suffer from being near him. As a result, he is resolved to spend the rest of his days in estrangement:

Too much now I'm at the vortex of bad happenings, and I am almost sure I ought to festoon the facade of my house and the bumpers of my car and then garland my shoulders with immense black flags of warning, to let every soul know they must steer clear of this man . . . (333)

Fearing that he will "steadily [infect]" (333) those around him with his malignancy, Hata decides to "go away from here," to leave his home and life in Bedley Run (355). Like Oedipus's exile, Hata's is a gesture that signifies both self-punishment and atonement, as he decides to live the rest of his days alone, exiling himself from Sunny and her son.

In this final transformation of his character, Hata effectively takes up the position of the abject Other: "I will fly a flag. . . . I will be outside looking in . . . in this town or the next or one five thousand miles away. I will circle round and arrive again. Come almost home" (356). This statement captures his position as marginal and ephemeral, an almost ghost-like figure that exists in a kind of limbo. The image of the flag and reference to coming "almost home" can be read as symbols of impending death. This final vision of Hata reinforces the idea that the death drive is inherent in traumatic male

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<sup>53</sup> Over the course of the novel, Hata's identity will evolve along with his name as he attempts to integrate himself into his adopted homes: from his Korean family name of Oh to the Japanese Jiro Kurohata; then once he relocates to America after the war, he adopts the name Franklin Hata, which eventually becomes "Doc Hata" to those in his community.

hysteria, where self-annihilation is the primary motive in the repetition of the past. By removing himself from his daughter's and his own life, Hata punishes himself for the pain he has caused.

## Chapter Five

### **“They wanted me castrated”: Phallic Masculinity and Castration Anxiety in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace***

[W]hen the male subject is brought into a traumatic encounter with lack . . . he often experiences it as the impairment of his anatomical masculinity. What is really at issue, though, is a psychic disintegration – the disintegration, that is, of a bound and armored ego, predicated upon the illusion of coherence and control.

(Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* 62).

In a crucial passage of J.M. Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace*, the protagonist David Lurie, to defend his sexual nature, uses an analogy of a male dog being beaten and punished for becoming “excited and unmanageable” (90) around a female dog. Lurie refuses to become like this dog, arguing that if given the choice, he would rather be shot and killed than be neutered. He makes this statement following his disciplinary hearing where he is accused of abusing his power and engaging in an inappropriate sexual relationship with a female student. The importance, for Lurie, of maintaining the unrestrained privileges of his phallic sexuality is evident in his obstinate defense of what he calls the “rights of desire” (89) against charges of abuse, victimization, and sexual violation. Indeed, Lurie’s subjectivity is founded on the idea that he possesses an essential right to virility by the very fact of being a white male; this virility is a matter not only of sexual desire, but also of a certain entitlement to power and privilege, which he is not willing to relinquish or have taken from him. In this regard, Coetzee’s male protagonist can be viewed in the context of what Kaja Silverman calls the “dominant fiction” of masculine identity. Specifically, in the “dominant fiction” the ideological and social formation of masculinity involves a disavowal of lack or deficiency in male subjectivity (2) and the projection of abject alterity onto female or feminized Others. Simply stated, Lurie denies his castration by adopting a decidedly phallic persona that he enacts through womanizing and predatory sexuality. Through his sexual aggression, Lurie objectifies his female lovers, relegating them to a position of passivity and silence.

In her discussion of the dominant fiction of masculine identity, Silverman also highlights the fragility of its construction: “The male subject’s aspirations to mastery and sufficiency are undermined from many directions – by the Law of Language, which founds subjectivity on a void; by the castration crisis; by sexual, economic, and racial oppression; and by the traumatically unassimilable nature of certain historical events” (52). Masculine subjectivity is vulnerable and threatened by sources that disturb the dominant fiction of phallic mastery. When a man’s sense of “manhood” or gender identity disintegrates, he experiences a traumatic unbinding, a process of “derealization” or “depersonalization”<sup>54</sup> that can bring about a sense of castration, disfigurement, even death. As Silverman argues, certain historical or socio-cultural scenarios can instigate this dissolution of masculine identity. Both war and oppression are identified as events that bring “a large group of male subjects into such an intimate relation with lack that they are at least for the moment unable to sustain an imaginary relation with the phallus, and so withdraw their belief from the dominant fiction” (55).

While Silverman’s analysis focuses on the historical trauma of World War II, my focus will be the post-Apartheid period of transformation in South Africa as it is represented in Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace*. While the end of Apartheid promised a new social order, one that Nelson Mandela imagined as a “Rainbow Nation” of racial unity (qtd. by Audrey Brown), Coetzee’s depiction of post-Apartheid South Africa illustrates the continuance of oppression, subjugation, and violence. Coetzee’s dystopic vision of post-Apartheid South Africa represents how “history sometimes manages to *interrupt* or even *deconstitute* what a society assumes to be its master narratives” (Silverman 55). With regard to the end of Apartheid, Coetzee’s novel represents not only the dissolution

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<sup>54</sup> Rachel Yehuda and Cheryl M. Wong discuss the characteristics of PTSD and Acute Stress Disorder, wherein they identify symptoms of depersonalization and derealization. Depersonalization is defined by the DSM-IV as an “alteration in the perception or experience of the self so that one feels detached from, and as if one is an outside observer of, one’s mental processes or body” (Yehuda and Wong 1). Derealization is likewise defined as “an alteration in the perception or experience of the external world so that it seems strange or unreal” (1). Following from Silverman’s discussion of masculinity, a traumatic experience can alter a man’s perception of himself and his relationship to the rest of society, so that what was once familiar and assured about his identity and his place in the world is no longer recognizable.

of the phallic master narrative of white colonial masculinity, but also a period of transformation in which a phallic black masculinity is emerging as the dominant fiction of a new patriarchal social order: a social order that continues rather than departs from a history of violence.

Coetzee's representation of this dissolution is intimately realized through the perspective of David Lurie, the white male protagonist, who undergoes a crisis of gender identity over the course of the novel. Lurie will experience the debasement and loss of his patriarchal power when faced with trauma. Specifically, Coetzee represents the dissolution of Lurie's dominant fiction of colonial masculine prowess through his traumatized reaction to his daughter's rape by three black men. The perpetrators of Lucy's rape embody the desire for power, the sense of entitlement, and the lasting resentment of colonial conquest among the emergent black patriarchy; as well, the rapists continue the pattern of patriarchal domination in which Lurie himself is complicit. Lucy's degradation and suffering occasion a moment of revelation for Lurie, who has up to this point showed little concern for the welfare of women. Indeed, Lucy's rape highlights not only a historical moment of violent racial tension in post-Apartheid South Africa, but also Lurie's own personal history of racialized sexual exploitation. Specifically, Lurie has a history of exploiting young, racially "exotic" women and, indeed, rapes his student Melanie Isaacs.<sup>55</sup> By aligning Lurie with the black male perpetrators, Coetzee draws attention to the violence perpetuated through the dominant fiction of phallic masculinity. By foregrounding the fiction of masculine prowess, Coetzee affirms rape as a desperate display of virility and power performed by men who are compensating for their own feelings of lack.

Although Lurie's past behaviour identifies him with his daughter's attackers, he struggles with himself to identify with his daughter's Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Indeed, following Lucy's rape, her behaviour can be seen as indicative of hysteria; she exemplifies the silences, terrors, and despairs of one suffering from trauma. Lurie must

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<sup>55</sup> Melanie's ethnicity is frequently considered by critics (such as Atwell) to be representative of South Africa's "Coloured" population. During apartheid, the term 'Coloured' was used to refer to group of people generally considered to be of mixed race origin (Adhikari xii).

empathize with the female rape survivor, if he is to atone for his own history of sexual violence against women. Eventually, through his selfless work with abject animals, the neglected and abandoned dogs that must be put down, Lurie begins his process of empathic identification. Indeed, Lurie's work puts him in direct, physical contact with abjection when he takes on the task of disposing of dog corpses. It is the empathy between Lurie, himself a perpetrator of sexual violence, and the abject Other, that undermines his phallic masculinity. By facing abjection through his relationships with both abused women and animals, Lurie undergoes a transformation of identity and ethics. Through his confrontation with death and trauma, Lurie redefines his sense of manhood, ultimately accepting vulnerability and abject mortality as a central part of the masculine as well as the feminine condition.

Lurie's personal crisis of identity and ethics is a reflection of the greater socio-cultural shifts of post-Apartheid South Africa. His struggle reveals a sense of loss in regard to both power and status. As a white, middle-aged man, Lurie finds his status has depreciated under the changing social conditions of South Africa. As critic Pamela Cooper states, "Lurie is broadly representative of an older social order: the officially defunct South Africa of Afrikaner dominance, statutory racial oppression, and the uneasy pleasures of white privilege" (22). This "older social order" is also characteristically patriarchal and Eurocentric, as represented through Lurie's academic career and scholarship. With his primary interests in the colonizing literary canon, and his devotion to Anglo-European male authors, Wordsworth and Byron in particular, Lurie feels his status at the university is diminishing. Indeed, Lurie's career as a professor has transformed along with the shifting cultural landscape that is accommodating the progressive politics of a liberal arts education. Specifically Lurie sees how the university has become "transformed and, to his mind, [an] emasculated institution of learning" (4). Within this environment, Lurie feels himself to be "more out of place than ever" (4). The suggestion that the university is "emasculated" reflects not only his diminished status, the shift in his career from professor of modern languages to an "adjunct professor of communications" (3), but also his hostility towards changes in the gender dynamic of the university.

This resentment will become even more evident when he is confronted by two female colleagues about allegations of his sexual misconduct with his student, Melanie Isaacs. Elaine Winter, the chair of his department (40), and Farodia Rassool, the chair of the university's committee on discrimination (40), are seen by Lurie as the agents of his emasculation. Of Winter, Lurie states that "she has never liked him; she regards him as a hangover from the past, the sooner cleared away the better" (40). Regardless of whether this is true or not, Lurie appears to project his anxieties and resentment onto both women. During the disciplinary hearing in which Lurie is accused of victimizing his student with whom he has engaged in an illicit affair, he comes face-to-face with his female antagonists. He characterizes Rassool as "quivering with righteousness" (53), a staunch feminist who is trying to paint him as a monster: "What does she see . . . ? A shark among the helpless little fishies? Or does she have another vision: of a great thick-boned male bearing down on a girl-child, a huge hand stifling her cries?" (53). Indeed, these images of oppressive, predatory masculinity are more his than Rassool's; while she may in fact view him as such, he does not know for sure. The images are thus a projection that reveals more about Lurie's defensive stance against changing gender politics than about how his female colleague really perceives him. During the hearing, Rassool's confrontation with Lurie will situate his abuse of power and sexual licentiousness within a long history of racial and sexual exploitation. The implication that Lurie is a white man in a position of authority and Melanie is a young woman of racialized descent puts into focus the power disparities of their relationship. Indeed, the power relations of male / female, white / "Coloured," maturity / youth, teacher / student are versions of the relations between colonizer / colonized and self / Other within Farodia Rassool's denunciation of Lurie's actions.

Critics have contrary views of Rassool's assessment of Lurie's and Melanie's relationship. Gareth Cornell situates Rassool's commentary and Lurie's disciplinary hearing within the context of the "politically correct university community" (315). Cornell expresses sympathy for Lurie's predicament: "Poor David Lurie! In any other context, behavior such as his might have been accorded a measure of indulgence, treated as an unfortunate slip, a peccadillo" (316). Lurie himself seems to feel the same way, seeing Rassool's accusation of abuse to be "absurd" (53). While it is possible to see Lurie



as the victim of political correctness, critics such as Ian Glenn suggest that Lurie “seems indifferent to the social tensions surrounding African women or women of colour” (95). Indeed, Lurie’s refusal to acknowledge the larger context of his sexual transgressions can be seen as connected to his intrusive womanizing, where he repeatedly fails to recognize or respect the agency of women, in particular, women of colour. While Coetzee encourages his reader to understand Lurie’s resistance to change by positioning him within a faltering system of white male privilege and entitlement, Lurie’s attitudes and behaviour show the disturbing connection between hegemonic masculinity and the abuse of power through sexual violation.

Resistant to the changes occurring around him, Lurie defends the boundaries of his masculine identity by asserting himself through phallic masculinity, and in particular, through his sexual conquests. Even before his one-sided pursuit of his student Melanie, Lurie’s sexual behaviour is caught up in a pathological pattern of womanizing. Early on in the novel he confesses that he has been a “womanizer” for most of his life (7); in more recent years, however, his sexual desirability with women has faded and transformed: “Without warning his powers fled. Glances that would once have responded to his slid over, past, through him. Overnight he became a ghost. If he wanted a woman he had to learn to pursue her; often, in one way or another, to buy her” (7). The image of Lurie shifting from sexually desirable man to virtually non-existing “ghost” clearly reinforces both the personal and cultural diminishment of his identity. Seeing himself as a “ghost,” Lurie recognizes how he is no longer the man that he once was; yet he is unwilling to fully relinquish this fantasy image. As Kimberly Wedeven Segall argues, Lurie is haunted by “his own ghostly specter – a younger, more alluring self” (44), which leads him to become “a sexist ‘predator’ of prostitutes and female students” (44). He continues to pursue this masculine fantasy, even though he has aged and no longer possesses the same erotic allure.

The first instance of Lurie’s predatory sexuality is his relationship with Soraya, the prostitute he has visited weekly for over a year. With his weekly visits with Soraya, Lurie feels like he has “solved the problem of sex” (1), having found a mode of sexual expression compatible with his temperament. After two failed marriages, Lurie understands that “a wife, a home, a marriage” (5) are too much commitment for him; he

is content to purchase sex in an exchange of “no emotion” (5). For a period, Soraya conforms to Lurie’s fantasy image. Her “honey–brown body” (1) is “exotic,” as noted in her escort profile; she is also young, “quiet and docile” (1), and described by Lurie as “a ready learner, compliant, pliant” (5). In other words, Soraya is the fantasy sexual object of white, colonial masculinity, an ideology in which Lurie’s sexuality is firmly entrenched.

While Lurie professes to have solved the problem of sex, his actions reveal otherwise. After seeing Soraya and her two young sons out shopping, Lurie finds himself following them. In that moment, Lurie’s desire is overwhelming. His “eros stalks” and the glance of recognition between himself and Soraya is subtly hostile, a “flash like arrows” (6). The dynamics of their relationship shift in the breakdown of his fantasy and in the realization that Soraya has an autonomous life separate from his imagination. His pursuit of Soraya takes on a desperate, even violent nature when he has a detective agency track her down, pursuing her even after she has ended their sexual arrangement. With this action, he identifies himself as “a predator” who “intrudes into the vixen’s nest, into the home of her cubs” (10). Lurie’s predatory sexuality is also reinforced through the reference to himself as a “serpent” (2), a phallic image that invests his sexuality with a decidedly malevolent quality, reminiscent of the serpent’s in seducing Eve. Lurie’s sexual desire or what he refers to as “eros” crosses the line, violating and trespassing upon Soraya’s autonomy. Indeed, this pattern of violation repeats itself in Lurie’s pursuit of his undergraduate student, Melanie Isaacs; both women experience the oppressive force of his desire. In both instances, Lurie’s violating sexuality reflects his fantasy construction of racially “exotic” women as obedient and erases female subjectivity.

Lurie takes on a persona of masculine prowess and phallic dominance to counteract the diminishment of his social status within the university and society at large. He is unwilling to give up the privileges and sense of entitlement that he experienced within the older social order. Rather than conform or adapt to change, Lurie acts out through pathological sexual behaviour: “He existed in an anxious flurry of promiscuity. He had affairs with the wives of colleagues; he picked up tourists in bars on the waterfront or at the Club Italia; he slept with whores” (7). Lurie chooses to conduct his sexual expressions through exploitative behaviours: buying women as sexual objects and

engaging in adultery. At the age of fifty-two, Lurie in his “flurry of promiscuity” can be characterized as going through a form of mid-life crisis, but his behaviour also bears the signs of hysteria, where this “flurry” connotes anxiety, agitation, and loss of control. Regardless of the labels that can be attached to his behaviour, there is little doubt that Lurie’s sexual “acting out” is closely tied to the psychological conflicts of his gender and racial identity within a society no longer attuned to white male entitlement.

The diminishment of Lurie’s social status within the transforming culture of South Africa is associated with both castration and death. Lurie contemplates the burden of his sexuality while growing old, and imagines castration as the potential solution:

Severing, tying off: with local anesthetic and a steady hand and a modicum of phlegm one might even do it oneself, out of a textbook. A man on a chair snipping away at himself: an ugly sight, but no more ugly, from a certain point of view, than the same man exercising himself on the body of a woman. (9)

Both acts, self-castration and the exercise of sexual release, are viewed as similarly undesirable and disgraceful acts for a man of his age. Seeing the latter as the lesser of two evils, Lurie continues to pursue his erotic desires, even while knowing that the affair he begins with his student Melanie is potentially self-destructive. Indeed, Lurie’s thoughts and actions towards Melanie are contradictory: “*No more than a child! What am I doing?* Yet his heart lurches with desire” (20). The self-division that Lurie experiences in relation to his seduction of Melanie suggests hysterical splitting. Torn between social propriety and sexual desire, Lurie is conflicted yet does not stop himself from pursuing his reckless attraction. In Lurie’s actions, it is possible to see a man who is on a self-destructive path, one that will bring disgrace and shame into his life. Entrenched within the patriarchal ideology of entitled male sexuality, Lurie will eventually self-destruct, losing his reputation, career, and dignity in pursuit of his desire.

Despite any reservations he may have, Lurie seduces Melanie, using the rhetoric of Romanticism, in particular, poetic tropes of idealized or eternal beauty, to persuade her – and in a way himself – into a sexual relationship: “Spend the night with me. . . . Because a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it” (16). This sentiment, while imbued with a philosophy that elevates Melanie’s beauty to the level of the sublime, is also in the

service of a coercive sexual manipulation and objectification that alienates the female subject and bars her from her own desire. Within this Romantic economy, woman's "duty" is to sacrifice her autonomy, so that the male lover may experience for himself the sublime pleasures of her body and beauty. In contemplation of Melanie's youth and beauty, Lurie declares, "She does not own herself" (18). Lurie takes the lead in his sexual conquest of Melanie; she, on the other hand, is repeatedly described as childlike, "passive" (19), and idealized in her physical beauty. This idealization is one way in which Lurie strips Melanie of her subjectivity by making her into a fantasy of the male imagination.

Lurie's erasure of Melanie's subjectivity takes on a more sinister turn in his infantilization of her. This diminishment draws upon a long history of racism and sexism, where the white colonizer asserts a paternalistic authority over the "childlike" racialized subject. As Stuart Hall describes in his analysis of power and fantasy in racist ideology, infantilization is a form of domination that erases the subjectivity of the racialized subject (262-63). Lurie fetishizes Melanie's body in a way that recalls racist and sexist stereotypes of African women as both "hypersexed" and "infants" (Hall 263). Lurie's infantilization of Melanie also carries Oedipal connotations, which highlight the perverse transgression of his sexuality. At one point, he almost slips and says to Melanie, "'Tell Daddy what is wrong'" (26). During the period when Melanie stays at his house, Lurie struggles with his conflicted desires: "Mistress? Daughter? . . . What is she offering him?" (27). At one point, he invites Melanie to sleep in his daughter's bed, and then makes love to her. This motif of incest will again appear when Lurie reflects upon his daughter Lucy and her experience of having him as a father: "From the day his daughter was born he felt for her nothing but the most spontaneous, most unstinting love. . . . Has it been too much, that love? Has she found it a burden? Has it pressed down on her?" (76). He later refers to his daughter as "the bride of his youth reborn" (86). The implication that Lucy has been oppressed by her father's love is further developed in her sexual identity as a lesbian; as Marianne DeKoven suggests, Lucy's sexual identity "might be a reaction against Lurie's excessive involvement with her" (850). The motif of incest that Coetzee develops in Lurie's relationships with Melanie and Lucy is complex.

The implication of incest identifies a power disparity realized through Lurie's sexual authority, and characterizes Lurie's sexuality as oppressive, immoral, and pathological.

Lurie's Oedipal desires resonate further when he considers his own relationship with the Oedipal story. Early in the novel, Lurie draws from the final chorus of *Oedipus Tyrannus* to remark on his existence: "Call no man happy until he is dead" (2). Clearly, Coetzee means to draw together Lurie's transgression of social propriety with Oedipus's. Like Oedipus, Lurie follows the pattern of sexual offense, exile, mutilation or symbolic castration (he is set aflame by Lucy's rapists and is physically scarred), and finally recognition of his own abject state as evidenced in his identification with wounded and abandoned dogs. Just as Freud noted in "The Oedipus Complex," the myth is meant as a "warning" against "pride" and a "realization of . . . impotence" (70). Lurie's own downfall reiterates these themes, where his pride derives from his sense of white masculine privilege and entitlement. Like Oedipus, Lurie too will learn that he is not immune from abjection and loss.

Coetzee further develops Lurie's sense of pride and impending downfall through allusions to other literary texts: in particular, to the canonical literature of the European tradition. Specifically, Lurie's identity is conflated with the subject matter of his latest academic project on the works and life of Byron. Indeed, Lurie conflates his own identity with Byron's throughout the novel, often using him as a mirror or double. Within his class discussion of Byron's "Lara," for instance, Lurie describes the Lucifer figure in such a way that there is no question he is also speaking about himself. In addition to his alignment with the rebellious figure of Lucifer, Lurie also typifies the archetypal Byronic hero in his arrogance, pride, contempt for social mores, and of course his propensity for sexual conquests. As Helene Moglen describes, the archetypal Byronic hero has a "need to prove his masculinity by sexual conquest" and "fears impotence" (128). Lurie discusses Byron's Lucifer as "'Erring': a being who chooses his own path, who lives dangerously, even creating danger for himself. . . . He doesn't act on principle but on impulse" (32-33). The self-destructive drive of Lucifer is also a reflection of Lurie's own path in life, in particular, his sexual transgression and contempt for social propriety. Taken further, Byron's depiction of Lucifer also speaks for Lurie's "secret pride" (33), that is, his arrogant assertion of white masculine privilege and power. Like Lucifer, Lurie

is led astray by his pride, causing him to act in ways deemed criminal and immoral by social standards. For this reason, Lurie, like Lucifer, will also be eventually “condemned to solitude” (34), destroyed by his own self-destructive pride.

During his lecture, Lurie acknowledges the monstrosity of this Lucifer figure, yet he implores his students to “understand and sympathize” with “this being with the mad heart” (33). Indeed, Coetzee encourages his reader to sympathize with and understand Lurie’s own “mad heart.” Lurie’s “madness,” his promiscuity and sexual predation, can be seen as a symptom of the embodied struggles of a man self-destructively following the ideological constructions of a faltering patriarchal structure. Even though Lurie’s actions are not justified, there is a certain amount of pathos around his character, where his “erring” ways sometimes seem more pitiable than evil.

The association of sexual license with masculine gender identity is also a prominent theme of Byron’s *Don Juan*, a text repeatedly mentioned by Lurie throughout the opening chapters. In one instance, Lurie describes how Byron found himself “conflated with his own poetic creations – with Harold, Manfred, even Don Juan” (31). This conflation of identity characterizes Lurie’s own identifications with Byron and subsequently with Casanova, Byron’s character, the legendary womanizer. Indeed, Lurie is labeled a Don Juan figure,<sup>56</sup> a “CASANOVA” (43), and “a real ladies’ man” (30) by those looking to prosecute him for his licentious sexual behaviour. Lurie alludes to the many sexual conquests of his poetic mentor. He identifies Byron’s many conquests with rape yet then dismisses this judgement, when he states, “Among the legions of countesses and kitchenmaids Byron pushed himself into there were no doubt those who called it rape” (160). Like Byron and Don Juan, Lurie is characterized as a man who would not think twice about abusing his power for sexual conquest. Indeed, Lurie sees himself continuing the legacy of masculine entitlement, where his conquest of Melanie is no more offensive than Byron’s many sexual affairs.

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<sup>56</sup> Don Juan is used as an example of male hysteria in Juliet Mitchell’s *Mad Men and Medusas*. Mitchell discusses womanizing as a central feature of male hysteria and uses the story of Don Juan as exemplary of the condition. She identifies what Freud called a “repetition-compulsion” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 22) in Don Juan’s expansive list of female sexual conquests and his evasion of any responsibility.

Lurie's sexuality cannot be viewed as separate from his prideful sense of masculine entitlement. Indeed, the connection is made explicit in his rape of Melanie. Even though Lurie insists that what transpires between them is "[n]ot rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (25), the description of the event is characterized by decidedly violent sexual imagery that also recalls the predatory quality of Lurie's previous pursuit of Soraya. Lurie arrives unannounced at Melanie's apartment and is described as an "intruder who thrusts himself upon her" (24). In his selfish desire, "nothing will stop him" (25). Contrarily, Melanie is described by her passivity: "He carries her to the bedroom . . . She does not resist. All she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes. She lets him lay her out on the bed and undress her . . . As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck" (25). Melanie is objectified in her passivity, and her autonomy is stripped from her; in this way, her violation can also be seen as a symbolic murder carried out by Lurie in his lust. Rape is figured as bloodlust, not only for Melanie but also later for Lurie's daughter Lucy, who describes herself in the aftermath of her rape as "a dead person" (161).

Lurie will construct his defense against charges of victimizing Melanie by asserting "the rights of desire" (89); in his own mind, his crime of passion has been committed in service of the principle of erotic desire. He repeatedly refers to himself as "a servant of Eros" (52, 89), an assertion that minimizes and deflects guilt and responsibility for his actions. Eros is a divine master for Lurie, who defends his actions by implying that "*a god . . . acted through [him]*" (89). In other words, Lurie sees himself as above the law and social codes of propriety, as almost inspired. As critic Mike Marais reiterates, "[Lurie] conceives of himself as an individual who is free to realize his every desire even if this means violating the rights of other individuals" (76). The extent to which Lurie is willing to go in defense of his phallic rights is tested during his disciplinary trial. Lurie is willing to give up his career, his reputation, and his home in defense of his entitlement to an unrestrained phallic sexuality. Lurie's exile to his daughter's country home following his dismissal from his position at the university is more than just an escape from public scrutiny. Like Oedipus, Lurie is effectively cast out or exiled for his violation of social codes of conduct. Lurie considers his punishment and

exile to be an attempt to castrate him: ““They wanted a spectacle: breast-beating, remorse, tears if possible. . . .The truth is, they wanted me castrated”” (66). By refusing to show remorse for his actions towards Melanie, Lurie illustrates his prideful allegiance to an identity of white masculine entitlement, power, and privilege.

Shortly after Lurie moves into his daughter’s home, her property is invaded by three black men. The men rape Lurie’s daughter and rob her home; all the while, Lurie is powerless to stop them because the men have locked him in the lavatory. His daughter’s rape causes Lurie to suffer a drastic disintegration of his subjectivity and gender identity, due in part to his profound sense of failure and humiliation for not being able to protect his daughter. Lurie refers to the experience as “the day of testing” (94), which aptly describes not only the torturous ordeal, but also the experience as a trial of his masculine identity. Set in contrast to his disciplinary trial, where he fought for his rights vigorously and defiantly, this “day of testing” renders him completely at a loss. Lurie is passive and powerless when he is locked inside the lavatory while his “child is in the hands of strangers” (94). Elleke Boehmer has commented on the significance of the fact that Lurie is “locked helpless and unconscious into the place of defecation [where he] is unable to help either his daughter or the dogs, who are shot” (348). Boehmer’s reading emphasizes the abject position that Lurie is forced into, which in Kristevan terms instigates a breakdown of identity: “Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without” (Kristeva 71). Lurie will face dangers to his identity in the form of assault, intrusion, disfigurement, and most lastingly, the experience of his daughter’s rape. This confrontation with abjection disturbs Lurie’s sense of masculine entitlement and power; he is forced into a position of utter helplessness. As Pamela Cooper states bluntly, “Lurie is effectively castrated, locked in the toilet and set on fire while Lucy is raped” (29). In this way, Lurie’s ultimate fear has been realized: he has been castrated. Yet it is not as he first imagines: the agents of his castration are not his feminist colleagues who seek to curb his wayward desires, but rather three black men who force Lurie into an emasculated position of powerlessness.

Coetzee draws upon the trope of castration and its long-standing cultural associations with black men, in particular as subjected to enslavement and lynching, to contextualize Lucy’s rape as part of a history of racially motivated violence enacted first



through colonial exploitation and racist policies directed against black men and women. Colonial violence has subsequently resurfaced in post-Apartheid South Africa as retaliatory rape and robbery committed by black men (Atwell 337). This cyclical view of history is reinforced by Coetzee's own interpretation of South African violence; in his discussion of Breyton Breytenbach's *Dog Heart*, which depicts post-Apartheid farm murders and crimes against whites, Coetzee sees Breytenbach's depiction of violence to be part of a larger historical context that emerged with "the arrogation of the land by whites in colonial times" ("The Memoirs" 313). Both Lucy's rape and Lurie's mistreatment of Melanie are situated within what David Atwell calls "an entire history of wrong being re-enacted in reprisal and vengeance" (338). The colonial enterprise of sexual and racial subjugation is repeated in a new guise, demonstrating a "cyclic re-enactment of power and appropriation" (338) over the history of "colonial and postcolonial history alike."<sup>57</sup> That Lucy's rapists are perpetuating and reversing the patriarchal and colonial structures of sexual subjugation is evident through the rape of Lucy's body and robbery of her property, as well as the castrating abjection they force upon Lurie.

During periods of colonial conquest and exploitation, the historical violence enacted against black men and women was based not only on racism, but also on deeply rooted patriarchal ideologies of sexual abasement. For black men, the threat of castration was real. As Robyn Weigman explains, lynchings with castration were frequently used to "[sever] the black male from the masculine, . . . interrupting the privilege of the phallus, and thereby reclaiming, through the perversity of dismemberment, the black male's (masculine) potentiality for citizenship" (83). Throughout the history of slavery and apartheid, black men were systematically deprived of "manliness" and phallic power, while also being denied subjectivity and citizenship. Indeed, as sociologist Robert Staples has argued, the denial of manliness and subjectivity to the black man during periods of colonial conquest has resulted in a defensive assertion of phallic masculinity in the post-colonial period: "The incorporation of a code of 'macho' behaviour is thus intelligible as

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<sup>57</sup> As reported in *The Guardian*, "More than one in three South African men questioned in a survey admitted to rape" (Smith).

a means of recuperating some degree of power over the condition of powerlessness and dependency in relation to the white master subject” (137). Understood in this way, Lucy’s rapists can be seen as enforcing a patriarchal phallic masculinity in response to a historical legacy of black emasculation.

According to Frantz Fanon, racist ideologies have not only emasculated black men but also, paradoxically, stereotyped them as the embodiment of primal sexuality. Black male sexuality is associated with an animalistic and amoral eros: the black man is “a beast” (170) and represents a base “sexual instinct” (177). As Fanon states, within European civilization there is a collective belief in “the Negro [as] the incarnation of a genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions” (177). The question arises, however, whether Coetzee’s depiction of rape in the novel reinforces this stereotypical image or whether he is invoking black phallic sexuality for his critique of colonialism. Many critics of the novel have denounced Coetzee’s depiction of black men as racist. The African National Congress accused Coetzee of representing “as brutally as he can, the white people’s perception of the post-apartheid black man” (qtd. in Donadio). Likewise, Nadine Gordimer has criticized Coetzee’s dehumanization of racial subjects, stating that “in the novel *Disgrace* there is not one black person who is a real human being” (qtd. in Donadio). However, there are certain limitations to these criticisms, as noted by critics including Ian Glenn, Mike Marais and David Atwell: first, many critics of the novel have mistakenly conflated David Lurie’s racism with Coetzee’s own perspective (Glenn 90); second, certain critics neglect to address the parallel structure of the text, which aligns Lurie’s rape of Melanie with Lucy’s rape by the three black men (Glenn 85; Marais 76); and third, by criticizing Coetzee’s depiction of black masculinity as solely racist, critics neglect to analyze how it is possible that racism is invoked intentionally in the novel as a mode of unsettling the white reader’s own complicity with racist ideologies (Glenn 90; Atwell 332).

Rather than seeing Coetzee’s depiction as reinforcing racist stereotypes of black masculinity, it is possible to see that he is intentionally illustrating the lasting effects of these cultural stereotypes on black men. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes a model of internalization, wherein the black subject takes up “the same collective unconscious as the European” (191), having incorporated into himself “the prejudices,

the myths, the folklore” that equate blackness to “ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality” (192). Specifically, Fanon states that the “state of being Negro” includes an internalization of negative cultural stereotypes and subsequently “[a] lust for revenge” (14). In this same way, it is possible to see the black men of Coetzee’s novel as becoming rapists in part because they have internalized racist – and as importantly, patriarchal – ideologies from a legacy of colonization (Fanon 193).

Just as Lurie patterns himself after the European literary archetypes of masculinity, the three black rapists of Coetzee’s novel can be seen as having internalized the colonial stereotype of black men. This process of internalization is alluded to in the description of Lucy’s rape scene: “[T]he men, for their part, drank up her fear, reveled in it, did all they could to hurt her, to menace her, to heighten her terror. *Call your dogs!* they said to her. *Go on, call your dogs! No dogs? Then let us show you dogs!*” (160). Here the men’s sexual violence reflects the racist myths and stereotypes of black masculinity as animalistic. Throughout the novel, the act of rape is figured as a sort of regression into a brute or monstrous lust, one existing within all men, black and white. As previously noted, Lurie’s sexuality is also described as being like a serpent’s (2, 10); in his rape of Melanie as well, he is likened to a fox clutching its prey in its jaws (25) and to a “wild wolf prowl[ing]” around Melanie (168). Lucy’s description of her rapists reiterates the characterization of men as savage and animalistic: ““They spur each other on. . . . Like dogs in a pack”” (159). While she is referring to the black rapists in this instance, she also makes the statement to her father implicating an almost universal violence in men’s sexuality: “Maybe, for men, hating women makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know” (158). Indeed, Lurie recognizes himself in the men who rape his daughter: “[H]e does understand; he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself” (160). Lurie’s growing identification with his daughter’s rapists develops along the lines of their shared sense of masculine entitlement and the right to express an unrestrained and animalistic eros.

Revenge for a history of injustice is enacted through the black men’s rape and robbery of Lucy and her property. As Lurie argues to Lucy towards the end of the novel, ““It was history speaking through them,’ . . . ‘A history of wrong. . . . It may have seemed

personal, but it wasn't. It came down from the ancestors'" (156). Although it is only one possible interpretation, Lurie sees the legacy of racial and sexual subjugation of black people within South Africa as providing the ideological basis for violent retaliation. Indeed, Fanon also suggests a similar theory, when he states that "the Negro is seeking to protest against the inferiority that he feels historically" (213) as a result of colonial violence. It is the abjection of the Other that "provides the foundation for . . . virility" under colonial patriarchy (211). Fanon stresses the psychological toll of a history where the black man is denied rights to virility, masculine subjectivity and citizenship. As Coetzee's novel illustrates, one result is a drive to prove one's manhood through defilement and degradation of feminized others.

This dimension of sexual violence, where rape is an expression of impotence or a sense of castration, is evident in the correlation between Lurie and Lucy's rapists. In particular, Ian Glenn suggests there is a direct parallel between Lucy's rapist, Pollux, the violent, mentally disturbed man, and Lurie: "Both Pollux and Lurie seem driven by unknowable motives . . . and Coetzee's naming hints that the double or twin for Pollux is not Castor but David" (87). Mike Marais reinforces this point in his suggestion that the parallel constructed between the two men illustrates how "the protagonist is himself guilty of the violence for which he berates Pollux" (80). Both men, Pollux and Lurie, have committed acts of sexual violence in part because of feelings of emasculation: where Pollux reacts against the denigration of his manhood within a history of racial and sexual subjugation, Lurie reacts to the denigration of his status, power and privilege following the social transformations of the post-apartheid era. Although originating from different sources, each man's sense of emasculation can be seen as contributing to his expression of sexual violence.

Following his daughter's rape, Lurie is forced to confront the reality of his actions, in particular, his sexual violation of Melanie Isaacs. Part of Lurie's redemption involves coming to terms with his treatment of her and, in particular, taking responsibility for the hurt that he has caused to Melanie and her family. Lurie apologizes to Melanie's father and asks for forgiveness for putting Melanie and her family through the trial. He also kneels before Melanie's mother and her sister, Desiree, in an act of contrition. The level of contrition is questionable in the ambiguity of Lurie's apology to Melanie's

mother. At the moment when he kneels down before Melanie's mother and sister, he also feels "a current of desire" (173) for Desiree, Melanie's younger sister. However, the fact that he does not act on this desire and recognizes it as inappropriate is perhaps an indication that he is no longer guided by his self-entitled lust. Lurie reveals that he believes he is "being punished for what happened" between himself and Melanie (172). Specifically, he is forced to recognize the effects of sexual trauma by attempting to identify with the female victim. Lucy's experience is a revelation for Lurie, who has until this point shown little concern for women. In the aftermath of Lucy's rape, Lurie is forced into a position of empathy with his daughter, as she shows the symptoms of depression:

Lucy is not improving. She stays up all night, claiming she cannot sleep; then in the afternoons he finds her asleep on the sofa, her thumb in her mouth like a child. She has lost interest in food: he is the one who has to tempt her to eat, cooking unfamiliar dishes because she refuses to touch meat. (121)

Not only is Lurie forced to take over Lucy's roles on the farm, "[sweep] the floors, [cook] the meals, [do] all the things that Lucy no longer does" (120), but he must also suffer along with her. Lurie faces his own post-traumatic affliction: "[H]e is losing himself day by day. The demons do not pass him by. He has nightmares of his own" (121). Like Lucy, Lurie relives the attack and tortures himself with thoughts that he should have done more to help his daughter.

During this post-trauma period, Lurie struggles with guilt and shame over his failure: "Locked in the lavatory while his daughter was used. . . . Lucy's secret; his disgrace" (109). Lurie's "disgrace" is intimately tied to his defective masculine identity. In his paternal role, he has failed to protect his daughter. But also, as a man, he is disgraced for his complicity in women's victimization. Both Lucy and Bev Shaw, the woman who runs the animal refuge, question Lurie's ability to really understand and empathize with the female experience of rape trauma. He is told by both women, "*You weren't there. You don't know what happened*" (140). After hearing this criticism, he is "outraged, outraged at being treated like an outsider" (141) and resents the assumption that as a man he cannot possibly understand what it means to be raped. Yet following a discussion with his daughter in which she recounts her experience, he begins to realize

this gap in his understanding. He can imaginatively place himself in the position of the three men, but he asks himself whether he has the empathetic capability to “be the woman” (160). It is this affective knowledge of the feminized position within a rape scenario that Lurie struggles to gain. Empathetic identification with the feminized other is shown to be his goal in his journey of atonement.

The private nature of Lucy’s suffering is troubling to Lurie, as he struggles to understand her silence and self-sacrifice following her rape. Lucy decides not to report the rape to the police but rather to deal with the issue as a private matter. Elizabeth Anker discusses the dialectic of private versus public in relation to both Lucy’s rape and Lurie’s defense of his privacy during his trial. While Lurie defends his own right to privacy during his trial, he is adamant that his daughter should make an official public statement following her rape. Anker argues that Lucy conceals her story in part because she recognizes how “her narrative of violation could give expression [that] would fuel interracial animosity of the sort systemized under apartheid” (240). Boehmer, on the other hand, suggests that Lucy’s silence reinforces the “highly conventional patriarchal and colonial prerogative of possession over the silent ‘body of the woman’” (344). Her silencing has been effectively reinforced through sexual violence. In Coetzee’s text, Lucy’s silence and subjugation are directly related to the socio-economic advancement of Petrus, Lucy’s African neighbour, who expands his position from being Lucy’s gardener and caretaker of her dogs to landholder of her property. Not only is Petrus revealed to be the uncle of one of Lucy’s rapists, but also there is the suggestion that he instigated or at least was complicit in her rape by his choice not to intervene: Lurie believes that “Petrus knew something was in the offing” (118). Petrus’s advancement rests on an exchange or “alliance” created between himself and Lucy, where she will become “part of [Petrus’s] establishment” (203); this entails becoming one of his wives, despite the fact that she is a lesbian and desires autonomy. For his part, Petrus will offer Lucy protection, allow her to remain in her own home, and incorporate the child she conceived during her rape into his family. As Pamela Cooper argues, the arrangement reinforces the conventional roles of a patriarchal system by relegating Lucy to the position of “wife and mother” and Petrus to the role of patriarch, master, and property holder. By accepting the alliance, Lucy is effectively “put in her place” (Cooper 31). Both Lurie and Lucy acknowledge the

humiliation and degradation of the arrangement: she states, “No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity,” and he replies, “Like a dog” (205). Like an animal – silenced, objectified – Lucy is forced to accept a position of inferiority and self-abjection.

In her marriage to Petrus, Lucy is positioned within the patriarchal economy in which women are property or currency that is circulated between men. Lucy’s rape has made this arrangement necessary by reinforcing her female subjugation; as she states, “I think I am in their territory. They have marked me. They will come back for me” (158). In this passage, the animalistic stereotype of the men’s sexual violence is reinforced, as her rapists are described as dogs marking their territory. Rape is understood as ‘the price one has to pay for staying on . . . They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors’” (158). Lucy must marry if she is to avoid “paying the price” by being raped again. In the marital arrangement, Lucy gives up her property to Petrus in accordance with the patriarchal model of ownership of women. Lurie is forced to witness his daughter make sacrifices and endure the humiliation of being denied basic rights in order to ensure her safety. Although he is outraged by her decision to marry Petrus, there is little he can do to stop her. As Lucy explains: “I am a woman alone. I have no brothers. I have a father, but he is . . . powerless in the terms that matter here” (204). Lurie’s patriarchal authority has been replaced by Petrus’s. The man Lurie once ironically referred to as “Fatherly Petrus” (162) indeed has become the patriarch of a new era.

Lurie’s powerlessness within the emergent social order of black patriarchal rule is a reality evident in his victimization during the invasion of Lucy’s home. Having been set aflame by the intruders, Lurie is physically deformed from the event: “He is trying to get used to looking odd, worse than odd, repulsive” (120). Lurie’s mutilated body can be seen as a spectacle of castration, a physical embodiment of his powerlessness and subjection to the new order. There is a direct connection between his physical suffering and his daughter’s. In his abjection, Lurie has taken up a traditionally feminized position. Coetzee uses the image of scar tissue to illustrate the Lurie’s gradual development of empathetic understanding with his daughter following her rape: “His scalp is healing over . . . So time does indeed heal all. Presumably Lucy is healing too, or if not healing then forgetting, growing scar tissue around the memory of that day, sheathing it, sealing it off” (141). Although he cannot understand the full extent of Lucy’s trauma, imagining her to

be able to “[seal] it off,” Lurie’s experience of being mutilated and physically transformed is figured as a “breakthrough into *feeling* the self of another” (Boehmer 348). Recognition of his own castration is the catalyst to his empathetic identification with the female Other.

As Lurie grows in empathy for the Other, he simultaneously follows a parallel path of caring for the unwanted animals brought in to the Animal Welfare clinic. Following the invasion of Lucy’s home, Lurie finds himself altered in empathy for not only female victims, but also animal victims. The experience of assisting Bev Shaw in putting down and disposing of animals alters Lurie’s sense of self: “He does not understand what is happening to him. Until now he has been more or less indifferent to animals” (143). In much the same way that he cares for Lucy following her rape, Lurie takes it upon himself to care for the wounded, dying, and dead animals that are surrendered to the clinic: “[H]e is prepared to take care of them once they are unable, utterly unable, to take care of themselves” (146). Lurie’s relationship with the animals is a form of identification and empathy: “[H]e has become a dog-man” (146), which recalls Petrus’s earlier position as Lucy’s “dog-man” (64, 146). This realization suggests a development in his knowledge and understanding of the abject Other.

The alignment of Lurie with animals, both dogs and goats, throughout the novel symbolizes Lurie’s own loss of masculine power and privilege. Critics including Louise Bethlehem and Marianne DeKoven have discussed Lurie’s symbolic connection with animals, focusing on Lurie’s “animal-double[s]” (DeKoven 858). In one instance, Lurie assists Bev Shaw in treatment of an old goat that has been ravaged by a pack of dogs; the goat’s scrotum is swollen, bloody, and festering with blowfly larvae. As Bethlehem observes, the goat is symbolically associated with Lurie, not only because it is a “traditional symbol of lechery, but more significantly through the imagery of castration” (169). Likewise the imagery of infection and infestation can be seen as symbolic of the pathological masculinity that Lurie had embodied and enacted through sexual violence. DeKoven reiterates this point, suggests that Lurie is like the old “over-sexed / de-sexed ‘goat’” (858), where the animal’s castration is the symbolic representation of Lurie’s own decline of virility and power. Notably, Lurie is also referred to as a “scapegoat” (91) by his daughter, in response to his public reprimand during his disciplinary hearing.



Following Lucy's rape and his assault by the intruders, Lurie's illusion of masculine dominance shatters, but in its place develops an empathy for and identification with the abject Other: both women and animals. The parallels between the mistreatment of animals, the historical mistreatment of black people, and the widespread abuse of women rests on the fact that each group has been victimized and objectified under a anthropocentric, patriarchal and colonial social order. While Lurie begins the novel as a proponent of patriarchal power and privilege, his transformation of consciousness involves a "feminizing or animalizing atonement" (Boehmer 350); Lurie learns what it means to be in a position of Otherness. Notably, his academic interests are similarly transformed to reflect his growing empathy for the female Other. Specifically, Lurie's work on Byron's life shifts in focus to reflect his emerging interest and understanding of the women in Byron's life: both Teresa, Byron's lover, and Allegra, his daughter. However, there are limits to his empathy; Lurie remains enraged with Pollux, feeling only hatred when in his presence. Even though Pollux is revealed to be "mentally deficient" (208), Lurie cannot change the way that he feels towards him.

The final scene of the novel is the culmination of Lurie's transformation of gender identity and ethics, where Lurie surrenders a young, crippled dog, whom he has grown particularly fond of, to be euthanized. The scene invokes the image of sacrifice, as Lurie is described "bearing [the dog] in his arms like a lamb" (219). As Cooper and Chris Danta suggest, the scene compares Lurie's sacrifice to that of the Biblical patriarch Abraham, who sacrifices a lamb in place of his son, Isaac<sup>58</sup> (Danta 733). Just as the animal victim symbolically replaces the human in the Biblical story, Coetzee also has the dog replace abject Others victimized within a history and culture of violence. Lurie gives up his animal companion in an act that is complexly tied to Lurie's own masculine identity. Instead of focusing on his loss, Lurie concentrates his energy on giving love to the dog during the final moments of his life. In this way, surrendering the young dog to the finality of death is reminiscent of Lurie's own process of transformation: specifically, his movement into a symbolic castration, the death of his patriarchal power, via the

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<sup>58</sup> Notably, the name Isaac recalls Lurie's previous lover, Melanie Isaacs, who is also an innocent victim. In this way, the dog also represents the sacrificial female victims of patriarchal societies.

development of love and empathy for the feminized Other. With the help of Bev Shaw, a woman who acts as a sort of spiritual guide for Lurie in his transformation, he also learns to connect with women on a deeper level.<sup>59</sup> Lurie's willingness to give up the dog may thus be seen as a gesture of his ultimate reconciliation with lack and loss even while it is also possible to see his final act of sacrifice as yet another selfish act of exercising his power over a helpless creature. The ambiguity of the final scene leaves open the question of what extent has Lurie actually been transformed or changed.

Throughout *Disgrace*, Lurie is shown as a man engaged in conflict with his gender identity. Coetzee uses the trope of castration to illustrate how Lurie both fears and resents the decline in his patriarchal power and privileges within the changing Post-apartheid social order. Entrenched within a gender ideology of white colonial masculinity, Lurie obstinately defends his rights of desire through an entitled sexuality that is oppressive to the women he objectifies. However, in bearing witness to his daughter's rape, Lurie has a traumatic epiphany of women's victimization in patriarchal society. Lucy's rape and his own physical assault are castrating, in the sense that the event forces Lurie to confront his own failures and vulnerability. Lurie experiences powerlessness and the humiliation of failure in his inability to protect his daughter from sexual violation. The trauma marks the psychic disintegration of Lurie's previous sense of masculine entitlement; Lurie's identification with his daughter, as well as with animals who are abused and silenced, marks the gradual transformation of his selfish desires towards a more selfless, empathetic love.

Like Hata in *Disgrace*, Lurie's journey is one of atonement for his complicity in the violence and suffering of others. Both men continue to endure the shame of their past actions and attempt to make amends. Yet in each narrative, there is ambiguity and doubt about whether these men will ever be able to repair the wounds they have caused in the

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<sup>59</sup> When Lurie firsts meets Bev Shaw, he does not like her because of her appearance and beliefs in animal spirituality. He describes his dislike: "He has not taken to Bev Shaw, a dumpy, bustling little woman with black freckles, close-cropped, wiry hair, and no neck. He does not like women who make no effort to be attractive" (72). Yet with her guidance, he becomes willing and able to share love generously without prejudice (219).

lives of others. Indeed, no amount of contrition can fully erase the traumatic pasts of those affected by patriarchal violence.

### SECTION THREE

#### **The “Walking Wounded”: Victims of Sexual Trauma and Violence**

The constant presence and threat of trauma in the lives of girls and women of all colors, men of color in the U.S., lesbian and gay people, people in poverty, and people with disabilities has shaped our society, a continuing background noise rather than an unusual event. What does it mean if we admit that our culture is a factory for the production of so many walking wounded?

(Laura S. Brown, “Not Outside the Range” 122-23)

In “Not Outside the Range,” Laura S. Brown discusses the “cultural toxicity” (132) of a society that disavows victims’ experiences by blaming them for their abuse, normalizes violence in all forms, and exposes those outside the dominant culture to a lifetime of fear and abuse. Brown suggests that it is this status quo that has allowed traumatic conditions to thrive over centuries, leading to the widespread and everyday occurrence of stress disorders or symptoms of PTSD in the lives of those who have been “conveniently consign[ed] . . . to the category of less-than-human, less-than-deserving of fair treatment” (124). Brown’s view counters normative patriarchal definitions of trauma as an event “outside the range of human experience” (119) by emphasizing the regular occurrence of traumatic events in the lives of girls and women and those in feminized positions. Trauma has been so normalized and engrained within the dominant sex / gender system that those who are vulnerable or marked as “Other” than the norm are often targeted with abuse and violence. Brown’s analysis focuses on how women in particular have been vulnerable to the abuses of dominant culture, having to suffer in silence as they experience the day-to-day traumas of poverty, discrimination, and insidious crimes of abuse, incest, and rape (122). However, women are not the only victims of this insidious trauma, as interpersonal violence in patriarchal culture targets all those who appear to counter cultural norms. This includes individuals who do not conform or fit into the narrow constraints of the binary constructions of gender and sexuality.

LGBT individuals are particularly vulnerable to the violent expressions of patriarchal culture, as they present a potential threat to the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity. As Kimmel, Dollimore, and Sedgwick have argued, women and feminized Others are those “against which heterosexual men project their identities . . . so that by suppressing them, men can stake a claim for their own manhood” (Kimmel 191). The Other is targeted by violence because, as a feminized object, he or she represents alterity that must be disavowed in order for heterosexual masculinity to remain hegemonic. Recently, much attention has been given to the shocking rise in bullying of LGBT youths and to the suicide rates among them.<sup>60</sup> The popularity of internet campaigns like the “It Gets Better Project” and “The Trevor Project” have emerged to bring to light the day-to-day challenges that LGBT individuals face, such as sexual bullying and threats of physical violence. Yet this violence is just one symptom of the pathology of patriarchal culture.

To suggest that it is patriarchy that is pathological, and that it is those who uphold and enact its violent *modus operandi* who are suffering from psychological or personality disorders, counters the ideological imperatives of dominant culture. When patriarchal society engages in strategies of victim-blaming, disavowing or silencing victim testimonials, and pathologizing the Other as hysterical and deviant, this needs to be understood as a projection of its own anxieties and a screening or veiling of its own crimes, its own inherent toxicity that poisons and corrupts our ability as a society to become more inclusive and egalitarian.

As Brown suggests in her discussion of trauma, one of the essential projects of healing and changing the existing social order is not only to recognize the destructive influence of dominant culture, but also to acknowledge the hidden or silenced stories of

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<sup>60</sup> The statistics detailing harassment, violence, and self-harm among LGBT teenagers confirm this view: nine out of every ten LGBT students have experienced harassment; over one-third have reported physical violence; and one out of every three LGBT children or teenagers have attempted suicide (*It Gets Better Project*). In 2010, a surge of teen suicides across the United States brought to light the constant scrutiny and harassment experienced by LGBT youths in particular, who are often the targets of bullying. In September 2010, nine male teenagers committed suicide after experiencing gay bullying (Badash).

the pain and trauma affecting those who exist on the margins of society (132). In this regard, the work of sharing our stories, “the lost truths of pain” (132), is a movement towards change. By sharing stories, we can avow our personal experiences of trauma; our stories have the potential to build empathy and understanding, which in turn may break down the barriers between self and Other, the dominant and the marginalized in patriarchal society.

In the spirit of this movement towards empathy and inclusion, I have included two texts which I feel present a direct challenge to the destructive impact of hegemonic masculinity, by depicting the intimate, personal experiences of trauma that affect those who do not readily conform to, or who stand apart from, the gender norms of dominant culture. Timothy Findley’s novel *The Wars* and Kimberly Peirce’s film *Boys Don’t Cry* portray effectively the pain and struggle of human experience under the constraints of a toxic patriarchal culture. Both the text and film highlight the inspiring courage of those individuals who dare to live life against the grain of dominant culture.

Both Findley’s novel and Pierce’s film promote empathy, while also challenging the constraints of patriarchal culture. Findley presents the breakdown or loss of the masculine ideal through the “queering” of identity and desire in the relationships between men. By showing how soldiers were exploited and objectified in patriarchal-military culture, Findley unsettles the boundaries of reason and madness by exposing the disturbing normalcy of violence in hegemonic masculinity. Pierce also challenges patriarchal culture in her film by blurring the boundaries of normalcy and deviance among the male characters. Specifically, Pierce disturbs the boundaries of normative masculinity by conveying how patriarchal masculinity is inherently pathological in its enactment of violence as a “normal” or “natural” expression of manhood. Although there is tragedy in the fatal outcomes for the protagonists of Findley’s novel and Pierce’s film, the profoundly empathetic effect each story has on its reader or audience is potentially revolutionary, showing how fiction can be a powerful counter-discourse to patriarchal constructions.

## Chapter Six

### Shattered Masculinity: Male Hysteria in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*

We must see the shell-shocked soldier not simply as a victim, silently suffering, powerless to help himself, but as an agent, using his medical symptoms as a weapon of resistance to military authority.

(Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves* xxi)

The experience of war and systemic configurations of masculinity can be seen as mutually constructing one another: war thrives, in part, by exploiting fears of effeminacy that are entrenched in masculine gender identity; hegemonic masculinity defends its boundaries through the proving ground of military violence. The fear underlying gender identity is revealed in Timothy Findley's novel *The Wars*, where Robert Ross's traumatic experiences in the war test the limitations of his masculine identity. By focusing on male hysteria or shell-shock as it has been accounted for in literary representations, most notably in the works of Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, and Robert Graves, historians and authors have questioned the patriarchal-militaristic system through which masculine gender identity is constituted. Of those historians who discuss male hysteria, Mark S. Micale, Eric J. Leed, Paul Lerner, Ben Shephard, Lisa L. Diedrich and Elaine Showalter are among those who emphasize that societal conventions of gender identity are influential in the attitudes toward and treatment of its sufferers.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Eric J. Leed's *No Man's Land* discusses the incidence of male hysteria in the Great War. Leed describes how disciplinary measures and psychotherapies were used to reassert the priorities of the nation over the individual's own will, which included reorienting the patient to his manly duties as a soldier. Micale's extensive work on male hysteria demonstrates how "sustaining patriarchy . . . required both idealizing the virtues and denying the vulnerabilities of hegemonic bourgeois masculinity" (200); Micale also shows how the construction of the disease not only ostracized but also consistently feminized afflicted men. See Micale's *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness*. Elaine Showalter's writings on hysteria also identify a rigid patriarchal adherence to masculine gender identity in the treatment of male hysterics, where soldiers suffering from the condition were seen consistently as weak and feminine (*Hystories*:

By situating Findley's *The Wars* within the critical discourse on hysteria studies, I intend to illustrate how Robert Ross embodies the tensions between the gender expectations of patriarchal culture and the personal drive to live according to one's own will; this conflict and the anxieties it creates, as I will argue, are key determinants of male hysteria in the text. As the criticism on *The Wars* illustrates, Findley's narrative gives voice to a historical event that significantly altered our understanding of trauma, memory, nationhood, gender, and sexuality.<sup>62</sup> Critics such as Heather Sanderson, Tom Hastings, Shane Rhodes, Terry Goldie and Sheldon Waldrep focus primarily on the depiction of sexuality and gender. Heather Sanderson focuses on the dualities of Robert's character and the unspoken homosexual desires that underlie Robert's and Taffler's relationship. Tom Hastings analyzes this relationship as the site of homoerotic desire and of the instability of hegemonic military masculinity. Shane Rhodes's analysis interweaves male homosociality, Robert's passivity, and the historiographic aspects of the text. Waldrep defines Robert's body as a site of homoerotic desire and fragility. Goldie posits Robert as homosexual, and examines Findley's complex use of sex and violence. By analyzing Findley's depiction of the Great War within a context of male hysteria, one recognizes the psychological toll of warfare not only on the individual soldier, but also on a generation of men socialized into patriarchal-military masculinity.

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*Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media* 77). Paul Lerner's *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma, 1890–1930*, focuses on the medical debate within the psychiatric field in diagnosing soldiers' dysfunctional behaviour as brought on by external or internal factors such as trauma. Ben Shephard's historical analysis of the medical transformation of "shell-shock" to "PTSD" also discusses how cultural ideologies of masculinity that promoted "emotional self-control" (18) were challenged by the proliferation of symptomatic soldiers.

<sup>62</sup> In almost all criticism of the novel, there is some description of the novel's postmodern, historiographic qualities. Coral Ann Howells focuses on Findley's novel as historiographic text mediated through the subjective lens of the narrator. Other critics, like Diana Brydon and Peter Klován, emphasize Findley's depiction of human fragility and the struggle to preserve innocence and goodness in face of the unspeakable trauma of the Great War. L.M. McKenzie situates Findley's text along with the works of Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves in its depiction of the gritty realism of warfare. Tom Hastings, as well, situates Findley alongside war poets like Wilfred Owen in depiction of generational conflict between fathers and sons.



My reading of *The Wars* takes as its focus Robert's rape at the baths at Desolé, France, the crucial scene of his sexual trauma, but also situates Robert in what I term "a rape culture," that is, a social economy that functions through the exploitation, objectification, and violent abjection of feminized Others. Understood in this way, Robert's reactions of horror and revulsion can be read as a direct confrontation between military values and a subversive identification with repudiated Others. It is this conflict that structures the central relationships in the novel, such as those between Robert and Taffler, Robert and animals, Robert and Harris as well as Robert and his deceased sister, Rowena.

Divided between his patriarchal identity and his identification with these abject Others, Robert can be viewed as a male hysteric caught in a state of psychological and sexual confusion. Experiencing firsthand the realities of warfare, Robert faces the shattering of his masculine ideal. Much like Findley's narrative itself, which pieces together Robert's life through disjointed photographs, memories, diary entries, and speculation, Robert's gender identity is fragmented, discontinuous, and ultimately, undetermined. In other words, the masculine norm no longer provides an ideal model for Robert's character. As a hysteric, Robert exemplifies the behaviours typical of patients suffering from the disorder; in particular, he struggles in his mental processing of traumatic events, represses his emotions, and reacts with violence in the expression of his sexual confusion. Ultimately, Findley's depiction of Robert Ross's hysterical dis-ease challenges the hegemonic masculine identity, identifying the destructive influence of the "toxic masculinity" that is endemic to patriarchal-military society<sup>63</sup> and showing its effects on one man's life.

During World War I, the term "shell-shock" was used to identify a masculine form of post-traumatic disorder resulting from exposure to warfare. A soldier's close "proximity to an exploding shell" was understood as a leading cause of trauma in military men (Showalter, "Hysteria" 321). However, the term "shell-shock" was not simply descriptive of warfare. As Showalter explains in "Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender," the

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<sup>63</sup> "Toxic masculinity" is a socio-cultural term used to describe the harmful effects of a gender identity based on aggression, dominance over others, and stoicism. See Kimmel for a discussion of toxic masculinity.

“efficacy of the term ‘shell-shock’ lay in its power to provide a masculine-sounding substitute for the effeminate associations of hysteria, and to disguise the troubling parallels between male war neurosis and the female nervous disorders epidemic before the war” (321). By masking male hysteria in the term “shell-shock,” medical and military authorities masculinized the nervous disorder to conform to hegemonic ideas of masculinity. Arguably, this gendered construction of traumatic neurosis worked to delimit the boundaries of masculine identity during World War I and the early part of the twentieth century. In this way, military masculinity was constructed to negate both effeminacy and homosexuality; yet the unstable, mutable definition of hysteria in relation to the masculine form of “shell-shock” reveals the fragile, unstable boundary between hegemonic masculinity and homosexual Otherness. As Showalter and other critics have argued, and as I intend to pursue through analysis of *The Wars*, shell-shock and hysteria are synonymous conditions, which originate as much from the trauma of the dominant sex / gender system as from that of warfare.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, Timothy Findley has commented on the rape culture that he perceives is responsible for the violent exploitation of men in the context of warfare. In *Inside Memory*, Findley describes his belief that “Robert Ross and his generation of young men were raped, in effect, by the people who made that war. Basically, their fathers did it to them” (151). In this sense, Findley’s representation of rape in the novel functions on two levels: Robert’s rape is at once an experience of personal trauma, indicative of his individual sexual victimization, and a collective social trauma, representative of the violent objectification of men during the war. Findley’s commentary about the novel’s rape scene situates individual and collective violence in a context of a patriarchal social order, where “their fathers,” the men in authority, are culpable of this extensive

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<sup>64</sup> In addition to Showalter, Lisa L. Diedrich, Sandra Gilbert, and Ben Shephard have all illustrated that shell-shock can be interpreted as a form of hysterical reaction to conventions of Victorian masculinity. Indeed, the incidence of male hysteria during the Great War had lasting implications on and off the battlefield with regard to gender relations. As Shephard writes, “The real point about shell-shock . . . was that it undermined men’s authority, and with it the traditional roles of the sexes in the family: men, supposed to be strong, self-controlled, the providers to the household, were reduced to being weak, self-pitying, dependent creatures. Women, hitherto the main sufferers from mental illness, now became carers” (149).

victimization of a younger generation of men. Yet this seemingly top-down power structure is not simply the powerful exploiting the weak, or the older generation of men exploiting the young.<sup>65</sup> The patriarchal-military structure needs to be understood as an ideological system that acculturates men into a position of authority, which in a military context is synonymous with violent aggression. Arguably, when this system is the dominant social order, to resist such violence is ultimately perceived as failing to be a man. During the early twentieth century, men who resisted, chose to ignore, or did not conform to the dominant sex / gender system were routinely punished and ostracized as hysterics or homosexuals.<sup>66</sup> As Findley repeatedly illustrates in his novel, men who exemplify characteristics contrary to the hegemonic norm were routinely victimized within this military system. For Robert, Taffler, Rodwell, and Harris, men who deviate from the narrow path of hegemonic masculinity, being indoctrinated into the hegemonic patriarchal-military system is akin to losing their humanity – in essence, a form of death.

While Robert resists losing his compassion through combat, at the same time like Hata in *A Gesture Life*, he struggles with his desire to emulate the men around him. From the beginning of the novel, Taffler is presented as Robert's primary model of masculinity. The narrator describes Taffler as "a hero" (33), "a Varsity all-round athlete" (33), and "a Captain [in the army]" (34). But even more than desiring these symbols of Taffler's high-ranking status, Robert desires to emulate Taffler's violence and stoicism:

[Robert] was thinking that perhaps he'd found the model he could emulate – a man to whom killing wasn't killing at all but only throwing . . . . A man to whom

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<sup>65</sup> Lisa L. Diedrich draws upon Pat Barker's depiction of Siegfried Sassoon and the Great War in *Regeneration* to discuss how World War I is configured as an intergenerational war between the old versus the young: "World War I, like most wars but more so, was implemented by older men and waged by young men. . . . [T]he old men, their bodies no longer powerful, nonetheless, omnipotently send young men, in their prime physically, to die for what they (the old men) deem worth fighting for. Young men were pawns in the war games being played by older men" (156).

<sup>66</sup> One notable example of the persecution of military dissenters was the white feather campaign, which distributed white feathers to civilian men as a symbol of shame and in condemnation of their masculinity. The feather connoted homosexuality, and the idea that if a man was not a soldier, he was not a "real man" (Simmers).

war wasn't good enough unless it was bigger than he was. . . . A man who made his peace with stones. (35)

The association of Taffler with the stones that he throws suggests that he possesses the iron will and emotional detachment necessary to be successful in combat. Findley also alludes to the story of David and Goliath to illustrate how Taffler is a man determined to prove himself by overcoming any obstacle. To emulate Taffler, his masculine ideal, Robert must master his emotions and distance himself from his instinct of compassion. Robert's sensitive nature, expressed in his close guardianship of his disabled sister before her tragic death and in his profound connection with animals, must be repressed to fit the narrow constraints of military masculinity.

Taffler's positioning as a masculine ideal implies a phallic model of masculinity. Yet, in *Male Subjectivity in the Margins*, Silverman's critical analysis of patriarchal privilege identifies in phallic masculinity an underlying denial of masculine lack or loss (15). Quoting Serge Leclaire, Silverman emphasizes the idea that "the possession of the penis . . . serves as a screen denying the fundamental character of castration. Man comes to believe that he is not castrated" (43). Silverman suggests that this illusory transcendence of castration or loss in the male subject is "lived by the boy as the paternal legacy which will be his if he renounces the mother," onto whom he displaces his sense of lack (45). In this configuration, the male subject projects his fears and anxieties onto a feminized Other to maintain the integrity of the myth that he possesses the phallus, a myth that is passed down in patriarchal social systems. In Findley's novel, Robert's experience of war involves his gradual disillusionment with this phallic myth through his direct confrontations with masculine abjection and loss. In this process of disillusionment, Robert's sense of masculine identity is in a constant state of indeterminacy and flux; this interim period can be understood as a period of hysterical loss, when Robert's ideology of masculinity is in the process of being shattered.

One of Robert's first confrontations with the illusory nature of his masculine ideal coincides with his first sexual experience, when he is "coerced into going" (37) to the local house of prostitution. The fact that Robert is "coerced" suggests that "against his better judgment," he must conform to the will of his male peers or else face "a kind of censure most men would rather avoid" (37). The fact that Robert is "shamed into going"

to a prostitute, to avoid being labeled as “peculiar” (37), exemplifies the latent homophobia within homosociality. Robert’s acquiescence to taking part in the sexual exchange at the brothel illustrates his desire to gain the approval of his male peers. The fact that Robert recognizes Taffler’s dog by the hitching post indicates that his participation in this sexual rite of passage is necessary if he is to emulate Taffler, his model of masculinity (38).

The fact that this homosocial enactment takes place in a brothel is also telling of the underlying structure of exchange in men’s relationships with one another. Indeed, the fact that Findley names the brothel “Wet Goods” (37) implies that women are the “goods” being exchanged in this sexual economy. Luce Irigaray also describes the “use and traffic in women” as a means of upholding a “reign of masculine hom(m)o-sexuality” (*This Sex* 172); in these exchanges, it is necessary that men “be exempt from being used and circulated like commodities” (172). In other words, the highly charged symbolic exchange of women between men carries a “homophobic injunction against male to male sex” (Weigman 39). Within this system, there is an implicit interdiction against a man taking the place of the female object that is circulated between men; such an act would compromise the boundaries securing male dominance. However, once Robert witnesses the sexual exchange taking place between Taffler, his masculine ideal, and the “large, male mute who was said to be Swedish,” a male prostitute, the logic of the heterosexual economy breaks down (38).

Even before witnessing this shocking scene, Robert’s own sexual initiation is fraught with anxiety. Before reaching the bedroom to fulfill his masculine rite of passage, Robert “ejaculate[s] coming up the stairs” (42). His inability to control his ejaculation demonstrates just one of the ways that male corporeality in the novel defies expectations of male mastery. After experiencing this anxiety, Robert falls into a silence: his ejaculation was “a problem he couldn’t discuss” with Ella, the prostitute with whom he has failed to have sex (42). Robert’s nervous condition is evident in his silence. Ella goes on to draw together Robert’s silence with the Swede’s: “I never met a man who didn’t say nothin’. ‘Cept acourse the Swede” (42). She then encourages Robert to peer through the “camouflaged hole” in the wall that could see “right through to the room next door” (44). Ella actively holds Robert’s neck and “pushe[s] him forward,” effectively forcing

him to witness the homoerotic scene in the next room. Passive and hence feminized, Robert is forced against his will to see his hero, his masculine ideal, engaged in a sadomasochistic sexual act: “He’d never dreamed of such a thing – of being hit and wanting to be hit” (44). Within a Freudian context, voyeurs do have sexual wishes, but they make “what is normally only an introductory or preparatory act into the aim of their sexual wishes” (Freud, “The Sexual Life of Human Beings” 306); in this regard, sight is aligned with sexual gratification – what Freud calls “scopophilia” (327). Yet what Robert experiences as a voyeur is forced as Ella holds his face to the wall. Instead of being a pleasurable act, Robert’s forced voyeurism foreshadows his subsequent experience of being raped by a group of soldiers.

What Robert sees through the hole in the wall confuses and distresses him:

One [man] was lying on his back with his back arched off the mattress while the other sat astride his groin exactly like a rider. The one who was playing the horse was bucking – lifting his torso high off the bed, lifting the weight of the rider with his shoulders and his knees – and bucking . . . The rider was using a long silk scarf as reins and the horse was biting into the other end with his teeth. . . . The man being ridden was Taffler. The rider was the Swede. (40-41)

Robert’s immediate reaction to seeing this sado-masochistic sex play between two men is to fall into a state of “panic” (44-45), which can be seen as a defense against the scopophilic sexual pleasure of looking; his symptomatic rage serves “as a defence against these wishes or gives expression to the struggle between satisfaction and defence” (Freud “The Sexual Life” 309). Ironically, while Taffler and the Swede engage in consensual acts of violent sex, it is Robert who is in a sense violated by this encounter to which he has not consented, as his innocence and ideals are shattered.

Robert’s state of “panic” has been interpreted in many ways. Heather Sanderson sees Robert as suffering from “homosexual panic” as part of his “refusal to admit his desires into consciousness” (89), suffering from his “unspoken homosexual desire,” which is directed first towards Taffler and later towards his friend, Harris (82). In another reading, Shane Rhodes interprets Robert’s “panic” as a “reaction of vehement and baffled disavowal” (42), where Robert cannot seem to process psychologically what Taffler and the Swede are doing to each other. Rhodes suggests that Robert is confused

“by the ever reversing roles of hero / enemy, top / bottom, passive / active, viewer / viewed, penetrated / penetrator, feminine / masculine,” binaries that are repeatedly distorted throughout the novel (420). It is also possible to read Robert as confused by his own role in the sexual encounter, where he has participated, albeit forced to do so, as a voyeur of the sexual act between two men.

Arguably, what Rhodes refers to as a “queer breakdown” of “binary logic” (42-43) can also be extended to the binary configurations of sickness / health in the novel, where Robert as well as his fellow military men move back and forth across the dividing line between mental health and neurotic illness. My reading of Robert’s state of “panic” is that it is a state of hysterical neurosis, where Robert transforms his unspeakable fears and desires into somatic expression:

[H]is mind began to stammer the way it always did whenever it was challenged by something it could not accept. He walked across the room and sat on the bed. He picked up a boot and held it in his hand. Its weight alarmed him and the texture of its leather skin appalled him with its human feel. He threw the boot across the room and shattered the mirror. (45)

The “stammer” in his mind at this moment connects Robert’s failure to integrate the vision of homoerotic sex into his conscious thoughts with an inability to transform this experience into symbolic expression.

The stifling of his thoughts and feelings gives rise to symptomatic behaviour. Freud links the sexual etiology of hysteria with a splitting of consciousness: “[A] severe trauma (such as occurs in a traumatic neurosis) or a laborious suppression (as of a sexual affect, for instance) can bring about a splitting-off of groups of ideas even in people who are in other respects unaffected” (*Studies on Hysteria* 12). Understood in this context, Robert can be viewed as suffering from a scission of gender identity the symptoms of which are a hysterical stammer, silences, and violent, embodied outbursts, as when he shatters the mirror.<sup>67</sup> While his splitting of his ideal of masculinity from his experiences

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<sup>67</sup> The fact that it is a mirror that is broken is also significant in the context of Lacanian theory, where the mirror reflection serves as the unifying image around which the subject develops an “Ideal-I” or ideal of selfhood that he will strive to achieve (Lacan, “The

as a man can be interpreted as a loss of unified, stable masculine identity, the loss of an ideal, it can also be seen as an act that propels Robert towards the liberating knowledge that the ideal of masculinity has only ever been illusory, a myth.

Of note in Robert's hysterical outburst is his reaction to touching the leather boot before he throws it against the mirror. He is "alarmed" and "appalled" by the weight, texture, and "human feel" of the object (45). This reaction of repulsion and horror recalls Kristeva's point that abjection can be understood as a real or imagined breakdown in meaning that "shatters the wall of repression and its judgments" (Kristeva 15). This shattering effect is caused by the loss of distinction between subject and object, self and other, and human and animal. In the leather boot there is a symbolic union of the feel of animal leather and the texture of human flesh that is tied to the subversive sexuality in the room next door. The breakdown or loss of distinction between man and animal also characterizes Robert's vision of Taffler as a "bucking mustang" (44), a vision that merges Robert's sexual anxieties and his loving feelings towards animals. Horses, in particular, are commonly understood to be phallic symbols, connoting strength, power, and virility; however, in Findley's text, the phallic horse arguably represents a more complex masculinity: one that connotes both power and fragility, both phallic and non-normative masculinities.

The breakdown or loss of Taffler as a masculine ideal continues to haunt Robert's existence. Taffler's transformation from pillar of masculine virtue to abject object culminates when he loses both of his arms in the war. When both Robert and Taffler are admitted into a convalescent hospital, Robert is shocked to find his one-time masculine ideal physically and emotionally deformed. The man whom Robert had considered as hard and impenetrable as the stones that he once threw is suffering from the shattering loss of both of his arms. The mutilation of Taffler's body and spirit in the war can be seen as a symbolic castration. In particular, the disturbing scene of Taffler's attempted suicide, where he rubs his "wounds to make them bleed" (152), is a shocking confrontation with loss and lack. The description of Taffler's body during this scene conveys an almost

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Mirror Stage.") Robert's act of breaking the mirror signifies not only the loss of his masculine ideal of Taffler, but also the loss of his own unified identity.



Christ-like spectacle of male suffering: “[Taffler] was kneeling on the floor in a pool of unraveled bandage with his forehead touching the stones . . . The stumps where his arms had been were raw and one of them was pumping blood in spurts across the floor” (155). This vision recalls the crucifixion, and a Christ crowned with thorns and dripping blood from his pierced sides. By invoking Christ’s wounds, Findley conveys a powerful image of the lost or sacrificed innocence and ideals of a generation of men.

Taffler’s open, bleeding wounds can be interpreted as an image of castration; his mutilated body is feminized in its phallic loss<sup>68</sup> as well as in its bleeding wounds, which link his wounded male body and the abject female menstruating body. Notably, Taffler’s earlier sadomasochism in his sexual encounter with the Swede is refigured in his suicide attempt; he once again becomes a spectacle of male abjection, yet this time Taffler’s violence is driven by a suicidal death drive, rather than by the drive to obtain sexual pleasure. The abjection of Taffler’s body is further reinforced by his kneeling position, bent over with the “end of the bandage . . . in his teeth” (155), like the “silk scarf” that he held in his teeth during sex with the Swede.

Taffler’s traumatic loss of his physical integrity is also a loss for Robert, who copes with his friend’s tragedy by engaging in a sexual relationship with Barbara D’Orsey, the woman who had been romantically involved with Taffler. The triangular relationship between Robert, Taffler, and Barbara has been interpreted as a veiled homosexual exchange between Robert and Taffler, through which Robert transfers his erotic feelings from Taffler to Barbara (Sanderson 89). Notably, the sexual relationship between Robert and Barbara is a highly charged merging of sex and violence. Witnessing her sister and Robert’s affair, Juliet D’Orsey describes her feelings upon seeing the sexual exchange when she was still a young girl: “Two people *hurting* one another. That’s what I thought. I knew in a cool, clear way at the back of my mind that this was ‘making love’ – but the shape of it confused me. The shape and the violence” (156).

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<sup>68</sup> In his understanding of female sexuality, Freud describes the little girl’s discovery of her lack of a penis as a narcissistic loss that may lead to neurosis and penis envy, or to “normal” femininity (“The Sexual Life of Human Beings”). However, feminist revisions of Freudian theory, such as Irigaray’s *Speculum of the Other Woman*, posit hysteria as a woman’s way of saving “her sexuality from total repression and destruction” (72).

Reminiscent of Robert's witnessing of Taffler's sadistic sexual acts at the brothel, Juliet's witnessing of Robert's lovemaking with Barbara repeats this same sexual violence. In this act, Robert's sexual expression can be viewed as a variation of hysterical expression. The sexual act with Barbara becomes a coded signification of Robert's conflicted psychosexual anxieties, a hysterical acting-out that paradoxically performs both heterosexuality and homoerotic desire.

In addition to the spectacle of Taffler's wounded body, Robert is confronted with the abject male body throughout the narrative in the treatment of soldiers in the patriarchal-military system. Early on, Findley describes Robert's voyage by ship across the ocean: the ship is infested with filth, overcrowding, sickness, fighting, and potential chaos as the soldiers are crammed into limited space. Men and animals are transported by the same vessel, an act considered as "barbarous!" by the commanding officer (60). The lines between man and animal are blurred as the soldiers are penned into the hold of the ship, with little concern for their welfare. Indeed, in the patriarchal military system, soldiers are dispensable commodities, objectified and abused like animals – like the horses used in the war. When Robert takes over Harris's duties of tending the horses, his first reaction is "one of horror. Then of anger" (60). Despite this initial reaction to the abject squalor of the hold, Robert finds refuge where the horses are kept: "[He] became completely disengaged from the other life on the upper decks. He even went below off duty" (61). Then, when one of the horses injures itself and needs to be destroyed, the duty falls on Robert to "squeez[e] a trigger against a living creature" (62). This experience proves to be a catalyst for Robert's hysteria: "[M]en and rats and horses – whatever it was you killed in wars. Robert's brain began its stammering" (62). In this moment, Robert can perceive no difference between men and animals: they are equally the abject objects of the war.

Of this sequence of events leading Robert to kill the injured horse, and subsequently injure himself in the process, Sanderson suggests that Robert's reaction to killing is a form of sexual panic: "The mercy-killing becomes a nightmare of misfiring that ends in complete panic. The scene is rendered in terms that indicate Robert's panic is also sexual" (88). Specifically, Sanderson suggests that Robert's firing of the gun signifies a sexual release, albeit a strained, awkward one, where the gun functions as a

“patriarchally inscribed phallic object” (88). In this way, Robert’s misfiring can be seen as connected to his premature ejaculation at the brothel; he can master neither his gun nor his sexuality. In both cases, Robert’s “failures” at mastery illustrate the discrepancy between his lived experience and the myths of masculine identity. Robert blames the gun for his botched attempts at shooting the horse; Sanderson sees his denial as a “displacement of his sexual anxiety onto his gun” (88). Indeed, the equation between the gun and phallic mastery is repeated following Robert’s rape at Desolé, where his thoughts are compulsively drawn to his “[g]un. Gun. He wanted his gun” (170). In the aftermath of his rape, without his gun to protect him, Robert is at a loss; he has been symbolically castrated as well as literally raped.

The breakdown of Robert’s normative masculinity is a gradual process fostered through his relationships with other men. Through Robert’s close male friendships, his sexual anxieties are mitigated as he discovers the comforts of intimate emotional bonding with men. With Harris in particular, Robert shares a bond that transports him beyond social constraints of gender and sexuality. The two men share a connection based on love: “Robert, though he never said so, loved Harris” (101). Although never publicly acknowledged given the reality of homophobia within the army, Robert’s feelings for Harris extend beyond camaraderie. Initially “confused by what he felt,” as “no one since Rowena had made [him] feel he wanted to be with them all the time” (93), he continues to develop a closeness with Harris that defies patriarchal constraints. Although the love between them is not physically expressed, Robert and Harris share an almost spiritual connection through their association with animals. Harris’s poetic narratives about his communion with animals enter Robert’s mind; his sentences “went somewhere inside him and they didn’t come back out” (92). Harris’s stories reveal a shared bond between them that includes an unspoken homoerotic desire:

Then I’d slide. Like a seal. . . . Out of my world into theirs. . . . It changes you.  
But the thing was – I could do it. Change – and be one of them. They aren’t any  
friendlier – the fish, you know. But they accept you there. As if you might belong,  
if you wanted to. It’s not like here. It’s not like here at all. (93)

The poetic imagery of being underwater like a seal and merging with the surroundings represents a sense of belonging and acceptance that neither man experiences in the army.

Harris uses poetic language to dissolve the barriers between man and animal, creating a world of liberation that includes both men's sexual and spiritual longings. Although Robert struggles to understand Harris's vision of unity between man and animal, he will eventually come to see himself in the spirit of this communion when he stands defiantly against the patriarchal-military system to protect a group of horses.

With Harris, as with his fellow soldiers, Robert notes a strangeness that pervades men entrenched in warfare. He grows to understand that "[h]e too was strange. (We're all strange, Robert thought. Everyone is strange in a war I guess. *Ordinary* is a myth)" (92). By suggesting that "*Ordinary* is a myth," Robert begins to question the binary structure that divides what is normal from what is abnormal, and in this questioning indirectly places normative masculinity in question. Following Robert's logic of undermining normalcy, the "ordinary" man or hegemonic masculinity generally is revealed to be a myth. This sentiment is also reflected earlier in the novel when Marion Turner, Robert's nurse, states, "It's the *ordinary* men and women who've made us what we are. Monstrous, complacent and mad" (17). The dichotomies between ordinary and extraordinary, reasonable and mad, heterosexual and homosexual are subverted, as sexual repression and violence, madness in fact, become the masculine norm during a time of unprecedented turmoil.

Yet at the same time that Robert questions the social constructions of being "ordinary," he also resists integrating homoerotic desire as part of his identity as a soldier. Right after Robert considers the idea that "everyone is strange in a war," he spends the rest of the night in a disturbed state, where he imagines running away, only "he kept running into Taffler. . . . And Harris" (93). The fact that his thoughts and feelings about Taffler and Harris continue to disturb him suggests that his desires are at once contrary to his view of what is normal in men and exemplary of the "ordinary" strangeness of war. In other words, Taffler's sexuality and Robert's love of Harris, just like Rodwell's strange connection with animals,<sup>69</sup> can be viewed as just variants on a

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<sup>69</sup> Rodwell ends up committing suicide after witnessing his company of men torturing animals. Forced against his will to witness his men kill a cat, Rodwell chooses to shoot himself rather than carry on through the war. The men's acts of cruelty have an almost sadomasochistic aspect, as when men defile and abuse creatures, they abuse and defile themselves in a self-perpetuating violent cycle.

continuum of masculine subjectivity in the disordered chaos of the war. Taken to a logical extreme, Robert's assertion that "we're all strange" could imply that "queerness" is central rather than marginal in the homosocial community of military men.

The parallels between Robert and Taffler reoccur throughout the novel, yet it is in Findley's use of animal imagery that the sexual connection between the two men is most fully realized. Just as Robert transfigures Taffler into a horse upon witnessing his sexuality with the Swede, he finds himself aligned with an animal nature when he finds a picture of himself in Rodwell's sketchbook, situated among illustrations of Rodwell's menagerie: "In all of them – on every page, the drawings were of animals. Of maybe a hundred sketches, Robert was the only human form. Modified and mutated – he was one with the others" (138). The fact that Robert is described as "modified and mutated" not only connotes the "not quite human" quality of the illustration, but also positions Robert in a transformed state, similar to Taffler after losing his arms. Although he is not mutilated like Taffler, this sense of "Otherness" is a connection both men share. In other words, like Taffler, he occupies a liminal existence: neither heterosexual nor homosexual, human nor animal, mad nor completely sane. In Findley's novel, both men defy the rigid definitions of what it means to be a man. Ultimately, the subversive "queerness" that is the context of this human-animal ambiguity in Findley's text is present not only in Taffler but also in Robert, Harris, and Rodwell, all of whom embody qualities of male hysteria. To classify Robert, Taffler, Harris and Rodwell as hysterics suggests that these men have struggled, albeit to different degrees, between conforming to the hegemonic ideal of masculine identity and embodying resistance and liberation in their expression of alternative masculinities. Both Harris and Rodwell seem more content with their differences from the hegemonic ideal of masculinity than Robert is, having embraced their creativity, feeling and compassion, whereas Robert still struggles to come to terms with his feelings of alterity.

Robert's hysteria finds its most overt expression in the instance of his rape. When Robert is raped by a group of men, the experience shatters the last vestige of his belief in the myths of manhood. Findley describes the trauma of Robert's violation as the breaking point of these illusions: "His mind went stumbling over a beach of words and picked them up like stones and threw them around inside his head but none of them fell in his

mouth. Why? he kept thinking. Why?” (168). In this rape Robert is stripped of not only his sense of manhood, but also his humanity as language fails him. Words, like stones (a reminder of Taffler, his masculine ideal), cannot be mastered in this moment when he is “naked and defenceless” (168). Stifled, objectified, and vulnerable, Robert is at the mercy of others – like an animal. Indeed, he is helpless against the men who brutally attack and sexually assault him.

The silencing of Robert’s voice is enacted as part of his rape: “[He] threw his head back and tried to scream but a hand went over his face and fingers were inserted in his mouth. They pulled at his lips until he thought his jaw was going to snap and the scream made a knot in his throat and began to choke him” (168). The fingers pulling at his lips bring to mind an image of a horse with a bit in his mouth as well as Taffler’s mouth gripping the silk scarf. The image of Robert being choked by a knot in his throat is reminiscent of early cases of hysteria, where sufferers often complained of “a choking sensation, as if a ball were in the throat, called the *globus hystericus*; coughs and loss of voice; pains in various parts of the body; tics and twitches; paralyses, deafness, blindness; fits of crying; fainting; convulsive seizures; and sexual longings” (Showalter, *Hystories* 15). Robert’s hysterical choking at the moment of his rape enacts vividly the breaching of his mental and physical boundaries. He suffers not only from the choking sensation and loss of speech, but also from a black-out: “Robert desperately tried to sink his teeth in the man underneath – but someone grabbed him by the hair and pulled him back so quickly that Robert lost his breath and fainted. A pale, mean light enveloped him. His brain went silent” (169). Like a dog, Robert bites one of his assailants but to no avail; he cannot overpower the men. The result is that he is left numb from the experience: “His body was completely numb and his mind had shrunk to a small, protective shell in which he hoarded the barest essentials of reason” (176). Through his rape and afterwards, then, Robert embodies the symptoms of a hysteric, traumatized by this breach of body, mind, and spirit.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Robert’s position as a male hysteric is further developed by Findley through the parallel representation of his mother’s hysterical illness. When Mrs. Ross hears that her son is “missing in action,” she expresses her painful realization that her son is probably dead: “She gave a final agonizing cry” (178-79). Then, within minutes, she goes blind:

In their analyses of hysteria, theorists like Juliet Mitchell and Judith Herman point out the parallels between war trauma and rape trauma, where in each case the subject suffers from a breach of his or her bodily boundaries. Mitchell describes how a soldier's wounding can be seen as a penetration that "breach[es] the body surfaces" and that breaches "the mind . . . in the same way" (141). Judith Herman makes the same point by emphasizing how rape victims experience the same "psychological syndrome" seen in "survivors of war" (32). Notably, her understanding of both war and rape traces a causal link to male violence. She uses the metaphor of a "war between the sexes" (32) to convey the widespread abuses of women and children, in particular, by "the hidden violence of men" (32). Taken further, Herman's "war between the sexes" should be updated to include another war: that between sexualities or more specifically the crisis of heterosexual / homosexual definition behind much of the violence in patriarchal culture.

Findley's portrayal of war violence and of the rape of a male soldier illustrates the gendered consequences of trauma that occur on two levels: the widespread toll of mass trauma on a generation of men and women, and the private impact of trauma on the individual. In this context of trauma, it is justifiable to argue that Robert Ross, and the thousands of soldiers who were exposed to similar conditions in World War One, can be characterized as suffering from a hysteria derived from excessive violence and victimization. Soldiers face a breaching of their bodily integrity through bombs and other weapons of warfare, but also confront the vulnerability of their bodies in other ways as well. Soldiers rape and are raped routinely, as rape is another weapon of military violence.<sup>71</sup> The use of sexual assault as a strategy of war is prevalent. Yet the intersection of gender and violence is not exclusive to warfare but, rather, endemic in patriarchal society. Findley merely brings this disturbing reality to the forefront of his narrative by exposing the normalized violence inherent in hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, Findley repeatedly destabilizes the polarization between femininity and masculinity,

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"'I'm blind,' said Mrs Ross. . . . There was not a trace of emotion left in her voice" (180). In her emotional numbness and blindness she mimics her son's hysterical symptoms.

<sup>71</sup> Rape is commonly used as a weapon of warfare. As Neil Websdale and Meda Chesney-Lind illustrate in their article "Doing Violence to Women," mass rape of women in warfare is used for the purposes of "furthering genocidal regimes" to "create a new race or to dilute . . . nationalism" (64).

heterosexuality and homosexuality, reason and irrationality, sickness and health to expose war, on and off the battlefield, as a conflict that is engrained in patriarchal social order. In this way, Robert's rape exemplifies the process of objectification, the loss of humanity, and the oppressive constraints of gender and sexuality that transform men into pathological beings.

Yet it is not enough to see Robert as the sole example of hysterical masculinity in the novel. On the contrary, Findley destabilizes the boundaries of normative manhood by revealing the pervasive hysteria within this norm, the madness of the ordinary man. This is clearly evident in the revelation that Robert had been raped by none other than his fellow soldiers: "His assailants, who he'd thought were crazies, had been his fellow soldiers. Maybe even his brother officers" (169). The "crazies" are revealed to be men like Robert himself. In this way, Findley's depiction of Robert's sexual violation not only blurs the dividing line between reason and irrationality, but also characterizes patriarchal-military culture as intrinsically violent and pathological in its defensive stance against alterity. The gang-rape is a display of power that conveys the force of conformity within normative masculinity.

The soldiers use sex as a weapon to assault Robert's vulnerably naked and "feminized" body. While the violence is literally enacted through male-male sexual conquest, it is arguably a homophobic act demonstrating the hypermasculine contempt for and fear of "feminized" masculinity: that is, non-normative masculinity associated with weakness. Similar to the homosocial society created in prisons, the battlefield is constructed as a hypermasculine world where "contests occur in which status is conferred on those who best live up to the prescriptions of the masculine script" (Toch 174). These "contests" establish a hierarchy among men, distinguishing the victims from the violators. In this sense, the rape that Robert experiences is a sadistic display of masculine power enacted in the context of the military system. Findley clearly sets the beauty and spirituality of Robert's and Harris's homoerotic bond in contrast with the repulsive brutality of Robert's homosexual rape to illustrate the systematic dehumanizing of soldiers through patriarchal-military acculturation. Within military culture, sex is loveless and criminal; it merely substitutes for the power and violence of the battlefield.

Following his rape, Robert is a different man. Findley reinforces the shattering of



Robert's mind in the minimalist language and arrangement of words on the page that convey his troubles in mentally processing the traumatic event:

Dust.

He tipped the water jug.

Water.

He threw the jug in the corner.

It broke into sixteen pieces. (176)

Reminiscent of the earlier scene of panic following his voyeuristic witnessing of sex between Taffler and the Swede, Robert reacts with violent destruction, breaking the water jug into pieces. He searches desperately and hysterically for his gun, fully knowing that his kit bag containing his "socks, shirts and underwear, his binoculars and the Webley" had not arrived with him (165). Once the bag and his belongings are delivered to him by Poole, a member of Robert's old battalion, Robert is barely assuaged. He longs for comfort: "Robert wished with all his heart that men could embrace. But he knew now they couldn't. Mustn't. He said goodbye quite suddenly" (177). Robert quickly represses his desire for the love and comfort of male homosociality in light of his recent traumatizing rape. As Sanderson suggests, Robert is made aware of his double bind: "His rape makes visible the homosocial bonds implicit in the masculine community of war, yet the taboo on homosexuality insists that sexual desire for men not even be admitted into conscious thought, let alone freely indulged" (91). As long as Robert is trapped within the patriarchal-military system, the intimacy and love between men that he desires is impossible.

The full extent of Robert's altered mind following his rape is not evident until he is confronted with the insane conformity to military protocol exemplified by his commanding officer. Concerned only with his military reputation, Captain Leather instructs Robert and Devlin not to retreat with the horses once they begin to be shelled: "'What would it look like? . . . We should never live it down'" (182). The name, Captain Leather, recalls the earlier scene when Robert throws a leather boot, smashing the mirror, after seeing Taffler and the Swede together. Indeed, the Captain will also blur the lines of man and animal by acting, in Robert's mind, like an animal gone mad. At this point, Robert breaks rank and tries to release the horses and mules to protect them from being

shelled. When Captain Leather tries to stop him, the confrontation between the two men ends with Robert shooting Captain Leather:

[Robert] got out the Webley, meaning to shoot the animals not yet dead. . . . [H]is

anger rose to such a pitch that he feared he was going to go over into madness. He

stood where the gate had been and he thought: 'If an animal had done this – we

would call it mad and shoot it,' and at that precise moment Captain Leather rose

to his knees and began to struggle to his feet. Robert shot him between the eyes.

(178)

The dividing line between madness and reason is no longer clear, as Robert shoots a man who is himself insane in his conformity. Perceiving the Captain as no longer capable of judging right from wrong, like an animal gone mad, Robert takes control of the scene by killing him. Evoking the earlier scene when Robert is forced to shoot the horse in the hold of the ship, he shoots Leather and the injured horses; yet unlike in the earlier episode, in this one Robert's brain is not stammering; rather, he is focused, resolute in his defiance of the military system. By this point in the novel, Robert's acts of violent resistance (or for that matter, the actions of Leather or even the men who rape Robert) transcend a simplified dichotomy of victim and violator, the innocent and the guilty. The war has effectively shattered the boundaries of social order, such that Robert's hysterical violence seems justifiable, even logical. Even the actions of Captain Leather and Robert's rapists can be understood in this way, where they too have been traumatized by the conditions of warfare. Thus, when we are also told of a second killing, Robert's killing of Private Cassles (183), his actions suggest he has gone mad; yet it is a madness that originates in the exploitation and objectification that have affected Robert throughout his experience at war, and that are endemic to a mad patriarchal-military culture.

Having maintained a level of compassion and humanity throughout the text, Robert

ultimately becomes a violator in shooting Captain Leather and the unarmed Private Cassles. Although his intentions are to protect the defenseless horses, he does so through violence. The moral ambiguity is noted by Findley's narrator, who describes the contrary interpretations of the event: "Mention Robert Ross – they look away. . . . Sometimes, they weep at this. Other times they say: 'that bastard!'" (6). Emphasizing different interpretations of the past, Findley's text allows the moral ambiguity to remain throughout. Coral Ann Howells suggests that the narrator's construction of Robert Ross's experience of the war, as compiled from "the mass of archival materials" that exist sixty years later, is still not enough to judge with certainty whether what Robert Ross did was right (132-33). Set in a social order that is based on violence, where differences are shunned and compassion is punished, Findley's narrative invites the reader to understand Robert's madness, and perhaps even to identify with him.

By representing the heroic protagonist as a male hysteric, Findley disrupts the conventions of identity and order that govern not only sexuality and gender, but also reason. Robert's act of protecting the horses in the final passages of the novel signifies a subversive assertion of his autonomy against the oppressive violence of the patriarchal-military system. Robert's final stand is his defiant commandeering of 140 horses penned up in an abandoned train (183). Once Robert and fifty of the horses are cornered in a barn, he declares, "We will not be taken" (212), referring to himself and the horses and dog that are with him during this stand-off. In this act of resistance, Robert stands up against his abject treatment through the war. In her interpretation of Robert's resistance, Sanderson suggests that the "we" of Robert's statement "signals an important change, a new unity in him with regard to his sexuality figured throughout by horses" (93). Indeed, throughout the text, horses have represented both Robert's homoerotic feelings and the paradox of his masculinity: "at once fragile and strong" (Brydon, "A Devotion" 82). In this sense, it is not only unity with animals that Robert is declaring, but also his own defiant divergence from the masculine norm. In Robert's assertion, the word "taken" also has sexual connotations in that this stand-off with military authorities returns to the trauma of his sexual assault. Robert's resistance in this moment is deeply coded with the sexual trauma that has irreparably wounded his body, mind and spirit.

The fact that Robert's statement is misunderstood by the attending officer suggests that Robert's hysterical expression remains outside the dominant symbolic order. Ultimately, there cannot be a simple resolution of the conflict between his assertion of his sexual autonomy and the rigid constraints of patriarchal-military culture. This irresolvable conflict seals his tragic fate, as "to Mickle, [the 'we'] signified that Robert had an accomplice" (185). Subsequently, Robert, the horses, and the dog are doomed as the barn is set afire. Even though Robert ultimately survives the fire, he is physically disfigured: "[H]is face is a mass of scar tissue" (190). The transformation of Robert's body is a physical remainder of his psychological scars and, like Taffler's wounded body and David Lurie's scars in *Disgrace*, embodies a castration that is denied in the patriarchal construction of masculine identity.

Robert's physical disfigurement presents a bodily identification with his sister, Rowena, and her traumatic death. Indeed Rowena's presence in the novel is central to understanding Robert's intimate connection with abject Others. She is associated with animals and with Robert's innocence. One of the first images of Robert that the reader is given describes "Robert and Rowena – rabbits and wheelchairs – children, dogs and horses" (11). Yet Rowena is also the source of Robert's most passionate, violent feelings. Her death inspires one of Robert's most violent reactions when he unleashes an attack by "butting his head like a battering ram" against the man hired to kill Rowena's rabbits (25). The double meaning of "battering ram" connotes both his likeness to rutting male animals as well as his unpredictable violence. Robert's fit of "madness" is suppressed as he is manhandled into submission. In this scene, Robert can be interpreted as suffering from a hysterical fit of rage, his physical outbursts manifesting sexual and violent impulses.<sup>72</sup>

The sexual etiology of his anger following Rowena's death is intimately connected to his feelings of guilt and his troubled relationship to his own desires. Rowena

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<sup>72</sup> Diana Brydon has commented on the psychological link between sex and violence in the novel, suggesting that there is a possible strand of incestuous desire that runs between Robert and Rowena: "Rowena appears to arouse incestuous desires in Robert . . . [that suggest] further areas of repression, of what Robert cannot begin to speak about and so cannot begin to deal with" (70).

“is what is called *hydrocephalic* – which in plain language means she was born with water on the brain” (14). Her disability presents a correlation between the “water” that disfigures her and the waters of the baths where Robert is raped, the water in the jug he breaks; and her disfigurement connects her to the fire that is responsible for Robert’s horrific disfigurement at the end of the novel. Rowena’s body is very fragile, a characteristic that can also be used to describe Robert’s emotional as well as physical state. As her guardian and through his athleticism, Robert’s masculine prowess disguises his own fragility, yet it is this fragile human body that Robert must face through his trials of sexual violence and warfare. Rowena is integrated into Robert’s experience of sexual trauma, in that after his rape, he burns a picture of her. This burning symbolizes the death of his innocence (172). Indeed, it is Rowena’s own death that consequently influences Robert to join the army and fight in the war, which in turn leads him to experience abject suffering. Ultimately, Robert blames himself for Rowena’s death and for not protecting his sister: “It was Robert’s fault. Robert was her guardian and he was locked in his bedroom. Making love to his pillows” (21). The fact that Robert was masturbating at the moment that Rowena dies links these two incidents in his mind, such that Robert perceives his sexual expression as causing Rowena’s death. He punishes himself by risking his life to fight in the war. By suggesting that Rowena’s death is a major factor in Robert’s enlistment in the army, Findley ties Robert’s participation in the war to both his sexuality and self-destructive impulses.

However, in Findley’s depiction of sex and death, the counterforce of the life drive is equally present in Robert’s relationships. The life drive is essentially what his narrator celebrates at the end, when we are told by Marion Turner, Robert’s nurse, about his valiant struggle against death by refusing to have her assist him in suicide: “He said: ‘Not yet.’ . . . There, in those two words . . . you have the essence of Robert Ross. And perhaps the essence of what it is to be alive” (189). Robert’s will to live is evident in his friendships throughout the novel, and symbolically tied to his primary relationship with Rowena. The final image in Findley’s novel is a picture of Robert, Rowena, and a horse: “Rowena seated astride the pony – Robert holding her in place. On the back is written: ‘Look! You can see our breath!’” (190). Here their mingled breath, their union, is taken

as evidence that Robert's passion for life, rather than his experience of violent sexual and military traumas, is ultimately what the narrative memorializes.

By piecing together a narrative of Robert Ross's suffering, violence and resistance, Findley illustrates the transformations of men into hysterics within a context of war. No longer able to believe in the myths of masculinity, traumatized soldiers confront the terrors hidden beneath the guise of phallic mastery, strength, and order. Yet in confronting these fears, traumatized men, men like Robert Ross, are engaged in liberating themselves from rigid identity constraints. To be a male hysteric is not solely a tragic position, as Robert's enduring passion for life remains the prominent memorial of his story. As Ben Shephard suggests in his comprehensive history of military trauma, the symptoms of soldiers signify an agency and resistance to military authority (xxi). These men are not simply "silently suffering," "powerless," and "victims" (xxi), but actively engaged in shattering patriarchal gender conventions. In this way, we can say that many of the "shell-shocked" soldiers of World War One were heroic, for they did what other men dared not do: they strove for integrity, autonomy, and liberation by facing the destruction of their illusions about masculinity.

## Chapter Seven

### Violating Masculinity: Sexual Dissidence in Kimberly Peirce's *Boys Don't Cry*

In 1999, Kimberly Peirce's film adaptation of Brandon Teena's life became a critical and commercial hit, propelling issues of transgender identities and "queerphobic"<sup>73</sup> violence into mainstream culture. The film was lauded for its subversion of heteronormative binaries of gender and sexuality, as it exposed the performative and mutable qualities of gender identity. Much of the attention that the film received was due in part to Hilary Swank's uncanny reincarnation of the real-life figure of Brandon (born Teena Brandon), the female-to-male transgender individual who was murdered by two men in Nebraska in 1993. Swank's transformation from a glamorous Hollywood actress into the masculine embodiment of Brandon was itself an exercise of gender performance that earned her an Oscar. The film has also been subject to much critical debate with regard to Peirce's adaptation of the actual events of Brandon's life and death. In 2001, the film journal *Screen* featured a series of articles by authors who critically assess the film's depiction of transgender identity under the mainstream constraints of popular cinema. Whether viewed as a neo-noir crime story, a reinvented Western, a romance, a bio-pic, a docudrama, a road-movie, or a melodrama, Peirce's film adaptation of the events leading up to Brandon Teena's death has become a part of popular culture. The mainstream popularity of the film has elevated Brandon to iconic status, "the stuff of legend" (Pidduck 97).

As an adaptation of real-life events, Peirce's film has raised concerns regarding the limitations of cinematic mimesis and the problems of transforming real events into narrative form. Indeed, much of the negative criticism of the film addresses its oversimplified depiction of complex issues of race, class, regionalism, gender and sexuality for the sake of widespread appeal. For instance, Lisa Henderson expresses

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<sup>73</sup> I use the term "queerphobia" as an inclusive term to refer to the presence of homophobia, transphobia, biphobia and other forms of fear, hatred and discrimination faced by individuals who do not conform or feel themselves represented in the binary system of gender and sexuality. The term is meant to include lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender, queer-identified, and people questioning their sexual or gender identity.

disappointment in her reading of the film's potentially stereotypical treatment of the working class (301), suggesting that the film's arguably stereotyped working-class characters are tied to the pejorative label of "white trash" and unfairly associated with pathological violence (301). Another target for critique is the absence of Philip DeVine from the film. DeVine, a disabled African-American man who was also murdered by John Lotter and Tom Nissen alongside Brandon Teena and Lisa Lambert, is completely absent from Peirce's film. As Halberstam states, Peirce "sacrificed the racial complexity of the narrative," choosing to ignore the connection "of racial hatred and transphobia" in the violence of the white male perpetrators (298). What this criticism highlights is the need to examine the film as a narrative: a fictional, aesthetic and ideological product that shapes and is constructed from real life events, but that makes no exclusive claim to being the "real" or "authoritative" version of these true events. With regard to the representation of violence and its sources, the primary subject of this chapter, I will look at the complexity of John's and Tom's psychic history of privation and social alienation, and their tenuous relationship to the codes of normative white masculinity, through the fictional construction of these characters.

The "trans-" or queer quality of Brandon's identity, which is most often viewed by critics as either transgender or transsexual, is central to understanding the violence enacted by John and Tom. Semantically, the term "queer" has undergone a transformation. The early usage of the term to refer to a person who appears "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric" and "of questionable . . . suspicious, dubious" character (OED) has been replaced. The contemporary and colloquial usage of "queer" refers to people whose "sexual lifestyles . . . do not conform to conventional heterosexual behaviour" (OED). Within this semantic shift, the term is recuperated with positive connotations, along with an "implicit denial" of its previous negative connotations (OED). Understood within the context of this semantic history, what I refer to as "queerphobia" in patriarchal culture can be viewed as deriving from anxiety over preserving the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality; queerphobia implies a fear of ambiguity, uncertainty or doubt in regards to an "authentic" identity. Patriarchies have a vested interest in preserving the binaries that structure sexuality under patriarchy, as this systemic configuration preserves the power and privileges of an elite minority of



straight men (Connell 39); when gender identity is viewed as an illusory and mutable performance, this structure of patriarchal power is challenged. The queer theories of Butler, Sedgwick, Dollimore, and Halberstam, among others, have greatly shaped the movement towards viewing identity as “multiple, contradictory, contingent, precarious and temporary” rather than fixed in binary configurations (Whitehead and Barrett 28). Notably, Brandon’s “queerness,” that is, his subversion of the binaries that construct gender and sexuality, is equated with falseness and deception by those who accuse him of lying about his identity. In this way, the violence of John and Tom is a punitive response to not only Brandon’s gender and sexual subversion, but also their own anxiety over the “queering” of identity.

The conflict identified above needs also be understood within the framework of the conflict between abjection and social order. Under patriarchy, queerness is associated with the idea of abjection. For Kristeva, the abject is that which is capable of disturbing “identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). Here, it is possible to see how the transgender or transsexual individual can occupy an abject position in relation to the dominant social order, by presenting a subjectivity that is not contained by the rigid constraints of binary logic. Patriarchal constructions of gender identity reject any person or object that breaks boundaries. However, as Kristeva illustrates, anger and anxiety toward the abject Other is often a projection, for the threat also resides within oneself: the abject is thus “the collapse of the border between inside and outside . . . self and other” (18). The Otherness that threatens from outside is the border of the one’s own identity.

As identified by Dollimore in *Sexual Dissidence*, social control is also often enacted through punitive measures against a perceived threat to the dominant social order. The relationship between the dominant social order and so-called “deviant” Others is a violently charged relationship of contradictions and instabilities. The term “deviant” is used here in a Foucauldian sense to describe the construction of sexual Others against which “dominant ideologies of normality and ‘nature’” are defined (Dollimore 212); in the context of *Boys Don’t Cry*, these sexual or gender radicals, transgender individuals, are perceived as posing a threat to personal and collective boundaries of identity. As Dollimore shows, it is not the perceived difference of sexual Others, but rather the

disconcerting sameness revealed between “normality” and “deviance,” self and Other, that is disavowed in preservation of the dominant social order. In this way, the interconnectedness of identities – male and female, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual – remains a contentious territory, an “unstable ground of both repression and liberation” (229). When binary oppositions are blurred and divisions of sexuality and gender threaten to collapse into one another, there can be positive or negative consequences: on the positive side, liberation from what Roland Barthes calls “the binary prison” can result in a “free play” of meaning and sensuality (qtd. by Kosofsky Sedgwick *Epistemology* 10); however, the reverse is also true. The instability of binary terms can also provoke defensive queerphobic sentiments, triggering a violent repudiation of sexual or gendered alterity.

It is a terrible reality that those individuals who embody sexual radicalism in their day-to-day lives are also risking their lives: “[D]eath, mutilation, and incarceration have been, and remain, the fate of those who are deemed to have perverted nature” (Dollimore 230). Even for individuals like Brandon who are not trying to be sexually radical or rebellious and are merely trying to live their life, there are potentially dangerous consequences for not following the status quo. The witch-hunting or scapegoating of sexual Others relies on violence to “symbolic[ally] ‘harness’” the perceived threat (Dollimore 221). Homophobic or more specifically queerphobic violence, as in the case of John’s and Tom’s reaction to Brandon’s ambiguous gender identity, is a condition or consequence of patriarchy. As Dollimore affirms, “homophobia [is] endemic to contemporary society” (33). Indeed, homophobia is so pervasive in our culture and engrained within dominant social norms that it is arguably culturally endorsed as the status quo. As Kimmel describes, in Western culture male dominance centers on “white, middle-class, early middle-aged, heterosexual men” (76); this is the ideal or standard for men, promoted in culture as possessing the greatest social, economic, and political power. In this culturally idealized form, patriarchal masculinity presents an “exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal, and violent” model of gender identity (Donaldson 645). In this way, the process of marginalization and victimization of the Other betrays a deeply rooted psychological fear and denial of one’s own abjection or alterity.

As previously stated, patriarchal masculinity is centred on the perception that biological sex will determine gender identity. Those born of the male sex will possess correspondingly masculine characteristics, and those born female will have feminine. The rigidity of these categories does not leave room for gender ambiguity or asymmetries of sex and gender. These binary categories exclude certain groups from fully accessing the power and privileges of white, heterosexual men. Sedgwick, Kimmel and Dollimore contend that masculine heterosexual subjectivity repudiates homosexuality as pathological, “unnatural” and inferior, depending on the alterity of homosexual or feminized Others to define and construct itself. “Women, gay men, nonnative-born men, men of color”: these are the identities that embody an otherness that is repudiated, punished, and suppressed in the construction of hegemonic masculinity (Kimmel 29). To suggest that a relationship of dependence and interconnectedness exists between dominant and marginal gender identities is to say that “antithetical” Otherness in fact “inheres within” the self (Dollimore 33).

In patriarchal societies, certain aspects of masculine subjectivity are split off and disavowed. Léon Wurmser discusses the psychological nature of pervasive denial of alterity as a form of depersonalization. Anxiety or fear of showing oneself to be “failing, weak, flawed, and dirty, out of control over your emotional, physical, or social self” (“Trauma” 310) can be understood in the context of the pervasive masculine shame. The fear of being perceived as weak by others, and the subsequent feelings of humiliation and shame, function within patriarchy to preserve a façade of manly dominance:

Feelings of tenderness and quiet or expressed caring are shunned as unbecoming, as a shameful loss of control . . . and need to be turned off and covered over by a stony mask of rigid, ‘manly’ self-control – only to break through in sudden spells of weeping and overwhelming sadness, anxiety or rage. (Wurmser and Zients 547)

The “break[ing] through” of overwhelming affect reveals the fault lines in the construction of patriarchal masculinity. As Wurmser and Zients argue, it is not only in sadness or anxiety that hegemonic masculinity is compromised, but also in the loss of control expressed through violent rage. In this regard, there is a direct connection between feelings of shame and the impulse to inflict violence on others. Wurmser and

Zients refer to this process as a “defense by reversal” that allows a mask of “‘manly’ self-control” to be preserved by deflecting one’s own shame onto Others (548).

This process of denial is also what Kimmel calls the “unmasking” of masculine gender identity (186). Specifically, the psychological foundations of homophobia and gender violence include a fear of being exposed as “not a ‘real man’” (Kimmel 189). It is this fear of exposure, particularly by and to male peers, and the subsequent feelings of shame that motivate certain men to repudiate violently any traces of an emasculating Otherness: vulnerability, powerlessness, ineffectuality, emotional sensitivity, and so forth. In this way, the defensive psychological processes of denial, repudiation, suppression, and projection are central organizing features of masculinity under patriarchal constraints. Along with this overriding fear, patriarchal masculinity is characterized by its collective denial of sameness with the Other and projection of its undesirable qualities onto the Other: in this case, onto a transgender individual (Brandon) and an African-American man (Philip DeVine). Thus, masculine subjectivities perceived as stable and coherent are usually fraught with anxieties commonly suppressed or expressed through gender violence. The quintessential example of this occurs in Peirce’s film *Boys Don’t Cry*, where John and Tom, two young white men,<sup>74</sup> react with queerphobic violence once they discover Brandon’s gender ambiguity. *Boys Don’t Cry* illuminates the disruptive threat of Brandon’s sexual dissidence and brings into focus how the dominant social order guards the boundaries of gender identity through queerphobic violence.

Brandon’s subject position as a female-to-male transgendered individual destabilizes gender norms. Although biologically female, Brandon lives as a man, and those around him also recognize Brandon as man – that is, until his secret is discovered. To those who live in Falls City, Nebraska, Brandon is an outsider. Away from his

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<sup>74</sup> Both men were in their early twenties when they murdered Brandon. However, as Siegel points out, the casting in Peirce’s film does not stay true to their age in the choice of using twenty-nine year old Peter Sarsgaard to play John Lotter. Indeed, in the film, John looks a lot older than the rest of the cast with the exception of Lana’s mother; his position as a father-figure / lover to Lana enhances the dark and disturbing presence of Sarsgaard’s portrayal.

hometown of Lincoln, nobody knows anything about him; he can live virtually without a past, erasing his former identity as Teena Brandon and constructing a new identity according to his desires. In Falls City, Brandon is able to be who he feels he is inside: a straight man. In this regard, the “outsider” identity rewards Brandon with the freedom of invention. However, as it will become clear later in the film, Brandon’s gender identity is also outside of the norms in Fall City; in discovering this, the locals, represented by John and Tom, will persecute, punish, and eventually murder this stranger in a strange land. Indeed, John’s and Tom’s brutal violence can be seen as representative of the intolerance of the community, where homophobic violence is a real threat. As Brandon’s cousin warns him, “They hang faggots down there,” suggesting that Falls City has a reputation of intolerance and violence targeted against LGBT individuals.

According to Christina Dando, who analyzes the film as a neo-Western, the setting of the American Plains is crucial to the film’s central conflict between “insiders and outsiders” (91). Specifically, Dando interprets the trope of “border-crossing” to be the central metaphor of the film, as it is the crossing of boundaries, both literal and figurative, that incites the violent climax (91). Conventionally viewed as a frontier, the American Plains is a territory traditionally marked by conflict in a violent policing of its boundaries; trespassers or border-crossing outlaws are met with violent opposition, “forced off the land . . . [in] attempting to define who belongs in this landscape and who does not” (93). Brandon’s position as outsider or “outlaw,” according to this Western generic convention, is reinforced through his sexual identity.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, as Dando suggests, Brandon’s border-crossing corresponds to the breakdown of binaries of gender and sexuality. Brandon’s ambiguous identity in this context reflects not only his defiance of patriarchal laws of gender and sexuality, but also the tenuous position of John and Tom within these same binary structures. Indeed, in many aspects, John and Tom too are outlaws, border-crossers, individuals who exist on the margins of dominant society. Serving time in jail, suffering from economic privation and social alienation as working-class men, John and Tom do not meet the ideal of hegemonic masculinity; however, their

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<sup>75</sup> John Rechy in *The Sexual Outlaw* portrays the homosexual as an outlaw figure, who lives on the margins of society and faces antagonistic forces of oppression.

violent reaction towards Brandon (and DeVine) suggests that both men act in conformity with this ideal by policing the boundaries of white, heterosexual masculine identity. John and Tom's simultaneous conformity to and exclusion from the hegemonic ideal of masculinity is a paradox that can be understood through Kimmel's theory of power and powerlessness in patriarchy – that men's differential access to power leaves some men frustrated, inadequate and angry – and through the psychoanalytic theory of abjection, as it relates to both personal and collective constructions of identity.

Before looking at how Brandon is violently repudiated and punished for his transgressing of boundaries, it is important to recognize the initial acceptance of Brandon into the community of Falls City. Almost immediately upon his arrival, Brandon becomes one of the boys, befriended by John and Tom when he gets into a bar fight trying to protect their friend Candace from the unwanted advances of a drunken brute. The chivalric gesture sets him apart from the sexism of the other men in Falls City. Yet along with John and Tom, Brandon chases women, drinks beer, and engages in risky macho posturing, as exemplified in his participation in "bumper-skiing," drag-racing, and the barroom brawl; as Gary Morris states in his film review, these are the "rituals of men," the actions that must be performed in order to be part of "the male world" (2). In these actions, what Brandon desires is conformity and acceptance among his new friends in Falls City. When asked by Lana why he "let John tie [him] to the back of a truck and drag [him] around like a dog," Brandon answers honestly: "I just thought that's what guys do around here." Kimmel suggests that risk-taking is part of the dominant social construction of masculinity and used as a proving ground of manhood: "We take enormous risks to prove our manhood, exposing ourselves disproportionately to health risks, workplace hazards, and stress-related illnesses" (37). This risk-taking is a condition of the anxiety of one being unmasked or emasculated as a "sissy" (36). While Brandon faces additional risks if he fails in his performance, there is a sense that Brandon's gender masquerade highlights the constructed nature of all masculinity. As Margo Jefferson states, Brandon "remind[s] us that every boy has to practice being a boy." Indeed, every boy or man has to prove himself through gestures, attitudes, appearances, initiations and actions in order to claim the power and privileges of manhood.

Brandon's performance of masculinity is reinforced through Peirce's symbolic use of mirrors and mirror-images as a repeated trope throughout the film. There are scenes that focus on the stylization of Brandon's masculinity by positioning him in front of a mirror: in the opening scene when he is having his hair cut and when he is partaking in the daily routine of becoming a man. In "The Mirror Stage," Lacan argues that the child's recognition of its ideal form in the mirror is an illusion or misrecognition that continues through life; this illusion allows the individual to ignore temporarily the reality of castration or lack in favour of the illusion of wholeness and unity (*Écrits* 4). For Brandon, the guise of masculinity and use of phallic substitutes (a sock or plastic dildo) can be seen as part of this fantasy construction of his ego-Ideal.

In this mirror scene, as cinematic spectators of Brandon's routine, we are privy to the transformative process through which he conceals his female body and takes on the guise of masculinity. Our gaze becomes what Mulvey identifies as the scopophilic or voyeuristic gaze, as we look at Brandon's body stripped down to near nakedness. In this sense, cinematic scopophilia takes part in the "sexual stimulation or satisfaction derived principally from looking" (OED). The cinematic audience is fulfilling the "desire to see . . . the private and the forbidden" (Mulvey 344). The curiosity of seeing Brandon's stripped-down body, in particular "the presence or absence of the penis" (344), is invoked in this voyeuristic scene, when Swank is shown inserting a tampon, binding her breasts in bandages and stuffing her underwear with a phallic substitute (a sock in this case). However, this private view of Brandon's morning routine is not gratuitous. Rather, Peirce's portrayal of this intimate moment also enables the audience to identify with Brandon. Indeed, a female audience may recognize aspects of their own bodies in Brandon's stripped-down, vulnerable form as well as the disruptive intrusion of biology in the form of menstruation, while a male audience may identify with Brandon's stereotypically masculine cockiness and swagger as he looks into the mirror and points to his image with pistol-like fingers while stating with satisfaction in his appearance, "I'm an asshole."

Peirce has commented on the universal appeal and identification with Brandon, stating: "[I]t occurred to us who made the film that we must have turned the tables on the straight audience, that by making this very queer character accessible in a familiar way,

we'd enabled straight people to identify with him and therefore to participate in something that has long been central to the queer identity and experience" (46). Specifically, Peirce highlights how her film allowed a straight audience to participate in the "possibilities of playing with and accepting different genders and desires" (46). In this way, the identification that Peirce's film invokes in both men and women breaks down the binary divisions of sex and gender in the appeal of Brandon's queer subjectivity. Rachel Swan reinforces this point, when she states that "you don't have to be a lesbian to identify with Brandon Teena; in fact, his unflinching, two-fisted maleness seems to . . . consolidat[e] a 'straight male' cowboy hero ideal" (47). It is not just Brandon's appearance that denotes his maleness, but rather the combination of appearance, performance, and sincerity that suggests that "Brandon is not so much trying to pass as someone else as trying to be 'him' self" (Aaron 94). The easily recognized masculinity of Brandon's actions, from his naïve determination and rebellious bravado to his courtly manners and tender love for Lana, leads to the consideration of this character as a pastiche of masculine archetypes (Peirce 44). These archetypes make Brandon not only an identifiable and sympathetic character, but also one who elicits a vicarious response in the audience with regard to his courage to be himself and pursue love against all odds.

However, in relation to the hegemonic form of masculinity that both oppresses women and uses violence to have and hold power (Connell 32), Brandon's subjectivity is marginal and ambiguous. While Brandon does engage in risky and "macho" behaviours, gets into a bar-room brawl, and creates "a manly bulge" (Phillips 140), there are also ways that Brandon's masculinity stands apart from that of the other men in Falls City. He does not act disrespectfully towards women; he is not jealous or possessive over Lana, his female lover, nor does he engage in the mind games and violent threats used by John and Tom. From the perspective of the girls he dates, Brandon's version of masculinity is more desirable than that of other men. As Brandon states of his previous girlfriends, early in the film, "They say I'm the best boyfriend they ever had." Brandon's charm and charisma, kindness and chivalry, set him apart from men like John and Tom, who are threatening, violent, possessive and chauvinistic towards women. This contrast between Brandon's boyish sensitivity and John's threatening hypermasculinity illustrates how certain qualities of manliness have become marginalized in relation to the dominant



construction of a violent and oppressive masculine gender identity. Indeed, in a Butlerian sense, gender is a temporal construct that can shift and change over time (“Performative Acts” 903); Butler views gender, not as an essence or a transhistorical formation but as, at any particular time, “punitively regulated cultural fictions that are . . . embodied and disguised under duress” (903). While Brandon’s kindness and chivalry are non-hegemonic in a contemporary setting of Midwestern America, they have a historical precedent in the courtly tradition. In contrast to the violence and homophobia expressed by John and Tom, Brandon’s masculinity appears as both a nostalgic, romanticized vision of what masculinity has been in the past and a future potential of what masculinity could be. From Brandon’s example, the “normal” or “natural” masculinity that is practiced by men like John and Tom is not as desirable as Brandon’s alternative masculinity. As it turns out, Brandon is the better boyfriend and the better man, a fact that not only undermines “normal” masculinity, but also threatens John’s claim to dominance.

John is identified with the “archetypal redneck chauvinist” (Swan 48): he is drunken, violent, abusive, disrespectful to women, rigidly heterosexual and close-minded. Yet, as Swan and other critics have noted, Peirce does not resort to clichés or stereotypes in characterizing the “villains,” John and Tom. Instead, she provides a more revealing, albeit incomplete, portrayal of the complex psychological history of the two men who rape and murder Brandon. Specifically, Peirce delves into the complexity of their rage and brutality in the context of their social marginization, masochism and powerlessness. In this regard, the audience is more likely to feel a certain pity for these men who, like Brandon, can also be seen as victims of patriarchal social order (Swan 51).

The homosocial dynamic between John and Brandon can be seen as involving both identification and rivalry. Brandon’s acceptance into John’s and Tom’s social circle occurs because the young men enjoy Brandon’s company, bonding with him over “fraternal activit[ies]” such as drinking and talking about women (Swan 49). Indeed, it seems as if John and Tom accept Brandon as one of their own, including him in these rituals of male bonding. For Brandon, inclusion and acceptance by John and Tom is a significant marker of the success of his masculine performance. As previously noted, Brandon risks his life by bumper-skiing to gain the respect and acceptance of his male companions; Lana, on the other hand, is not impressed by this display of bravado. In this

regard, Brandon highlights the underlying principle of male homosociality: “Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood” (Kimmel 33). In this way, other men are the “gender police” (36) who maintain the boundaries of masculine identity, excluding Others who are different from the norm.

Brandon’s acceptance by John and Tom also conveys the importance of mutual identification among men who are alienated from dominant culture. The male characters are products of a regional culture where conformity, boredom, and privation are all part of the conditions that breed a violent and oppressive masculinity (Henderson 301). John and Tom, as well as the female members of their social circle, are all identified as “wall people,” a name that Gary Morris defines in his review as “social cast-offs . . . who hang out against the wall of an all-night market waiting for something to happen” (2). Implicit in this identity as “wall people” is the boredom of living in a small town and the economic privation that prevents these characters from escaping their bleak environment, as well as the social ostracism they experience from the rest of their community. Indeed, drinking and drugs seem to be the only form of escape available to these characters, who are otherwise stuck in a dead-end town. Brandon, John and Tom routinely commit crimes, most often stealing cars; John and Tom have spent time in jail for car theft. Brandon is also incarcerated for not showing up in court, as Teena Brandon, on car theft charges. This connection between criminality and masculinity can be read as a symptom of what Horrocks calls “masculinity in crisis,” the pathological condition of some men’s alienation and sense of lack in relation to the power and privileges of hegemonic masculinity. Like Kimmel, Horrocks argues that the majority of men feel a sense of powerlessness, particularly economic powerlessness, which in turn, leads to feelings of inadequacy, impotence or castration (31). When men fear they are inadequate, they may act out in symptomatic behaviour: criminal acts, alcoholism, drug addiction and violence. Indeed, as Horrocks states, “violence [is] a means to prove [one is] a man – through actions that are culturally sanctioned or promoted as masculine” (31).

Throughout the film, Peirce presents a counter discourse to a binary discourse of homosexuality and heterosexuality through her blurring of normalcy and deviance, dominance and marginality among the male characters. Specifically, Peirce puts into question John’s and Tom’s seemingly stable masculine gender identities by illustrating

their instability and interconnection with Brandon's queerness. As Aaron argues, there is a "queerness" (96) in each man. The fact that John and Tom are ex-convicts implies their own prior experience of social marginalization as well as the powerlessness and victimization of incarceration. Henderson suggests that John's and Tom's reaction to Brandon's transgender identity is in part a residual effect of the "psychic torture [of] incarceration" (301). Carol Siegel takes this argument a step further in her reading of the film: she argues that the subjectivities of John and Tom are erased or diminished within the film and within a culture that alienates working-class young men. Siegel also mentions the alleged sexual assault history of John and Tom in the prison system. Susan Muska and Greta Olafsdottir's documentary *The Brandon Teena Story* includes an interview with a prison inmate, who makes the claim that "John Lotter was 'sexually assaulted' repeatedly in prison and that, upon his release, John wanted to 'even up the odds,' feeling that it was 'my turn now'" (Siegel, n.p.). Peirce's film briefly mentions how John's experience in prison affected him emotionally and psychologically: "Four years ago you wouldn't have been able to talk to him." The cycle of violence is shown to be perpetuated through the patriarchal prison system, where young men who are violated subsequently become violators themselves. Targeting feminized Others as victims affirms this cycle of abuse, as male victims will often reestablish their dominance by projecting their anxieties of vulnerability or inadequacy onto Others.

The psychological complexity of John and Tom is also conveyed in their self-destructive activities: Tom engages in self-mutilation and is a pyromaniac, while John, we are informed, has "no impulse control." As noted by Katherine Monk, Tom's self-mutilation is represented sympathetically to the audience, showing his sense of "pain and helplessness," while John's fatalism is also represented with a certain degree of pity. Indeed, one could feel sorry for these characters who are literally and figuratively trapped within the constraints of the social, economic, and cultural impoverishment of Falls City.<sup>76</sup> When Tom reveals to Brandon that he self-mutilates, he states that cutting himself

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<sup>76</sup> Reportedly, the local townspeople of Falls City did not react favourably to Peirce's portrayal of their town. Many residents questioned the depictions of rampant drug use and alcoholism, as well as the false characterization of the townspeople as "white trash" (Rooney).

“gets control of this thing inside me, so I don’t lash out at someone.” Tom dissociates himself from his uncontrollable “thing inside,” which is both his anger and his vulnerability. It is the fear of this presence of Otherness within the self that is most revealing of the psychology of his masculinity. In his dissociation from his body and suppression of his emotion, Tom displays a symptom of male hysteria. Specifically, his cutting is indicative of the hysteric’s psychic conflict. Self-inflicted pain or masochism is a form of signification, through which he expresses his conflicts regarding masculinity: “Me and John used to do it to ourselves all the time in lockup. I could always go deeper than him. He was such a wuss.” Tom’s description of the contest between himself and John, as they engage in cutting, also carries connotations of homosocial desire; the phrasing of going “deeper” in one’s body with the knife and the mutual action of doing “it to ourselves” connote both sex and masturbation. Tom’s self-cutting can also be viewed as an act that feminizes him. Self-cutting has become associated with women and girls. It is thus for Tom a form of bodily expression by which he performs his masculinity while also latently enacting a passive femininity. In this way, cutting is a symptom of Tom’s conflicted relationship to his own body and emotions.

John is similarly characterized by his self-destructive behaviour, most clearly evident in his fatalism or disregard for his own well-being and that of others, as well as his uncontrollable temper. At one point, John instructs Brandon, who is driving, to outrun the cops by going onto the gravel road. Blinded by clouds of dust, Brandon cannot see where he is headed, but he follows John’s command to keep driving. It is only until they are finally stopped by the police that it is revealed that John was leading them in the direction of “a hundred-foot drop.” While John is clearly to blame for leading the car towards the ravine, he reacts in anger and blames Brandon. In this instance, John’s “impulse control” problem is revealed to be a symptom of his masochism and hysteria.

Among the men, the power dynamics of patriarchal culture are enacted through their interpersonal relationships. Specifically, it is possible to read the relationships between John, Tom and Brandon as hierarchical, involving rivalries for power. In John’s and Tom’s homosocial bond, John is conveyed as the dominant male, whereas Tom is characterized as the follower. As Henderson suggests in her reading of the film, Tom conveys a “copycat impotence” (303). In many ways, Tom looks to John for leadership

and approval, a point that is clearly evident during the rape scene when John is the first man to violate Brandon, then cheers and goads Tom into taking his turn with Brandon. Tom usually does what John tells him to do and identifies himself as the “only one who can control that fucker [John]”; the relationship thus rests on an unstable power dynamic, where John holds most of the control, while Tom takes a secondary, arguably feminized role as John’s friend, accomplice, and, in a way, caretaker.

John and Tom use intimidation and threats of violence constantly to disavow any feelings of weakness or inadequacy. They torment Brandon psychologically, perceiving him as weaker or more effeminate. On first meeting Brandon, John comments on the small size of Brandon’s hands and tells him that “if [he’s] gonna get into fights over girls, [he needs to] learn a few moves.” The implication that Brandon is inadequate at fighting and has not mastered violence, illustrates just one of the moments when Brandon’s masculinity is contested. John and Tom will subsequently use terms of emasculation to refer to Brandon, such as “little man” or “little dude.” With Tom as well, Brandon is forced to admit he is a “pussy” as he does not do self-cutting or possess the battle scars of masculinity as his male companions do. John and Tom also boss Brandon around, telling him to “clean the ashtrays” when they see Brandon helping out around Lana’s house. In this instance, Brandon’s actions do not conform to “normal” masculinity. As Jennifer Esposito notes, within the dominant gender configuration “men do not wait on people and clean up after them” (239); when Brandon performs these “feminine” tasks of housekeeping and shows consideration for Lana and her mother, he is unwittingly diverging from the norm and putting himself at risk of being discovered.

The tension between Brandon and John escalates as Brandon succeeds John as the primary man in Lana’s life. John makes his proprietary claim evident to Brandon when he states, “You gotta remember, little man, this is my house.” John not only positions himself as the patriarch of Lana’s family, but also conveys his dominance over Brandon by belittling his manhood. Yet the fact that Brandon, a so-called “little man,” has effectively bested John in the contest for Lana’s love also places John’s masculinity into question. Further, the ambiguous position of John within Lana’s family characterizes the dysfunction and pathology of patriarchy as represented in the film. John is the father of a little girl who lives with Lana and her mother instead of her own biological parents. John

also flirts with Lana's mother, dancing with her seductively as well as with Lana herself, who refers to him as a "stalker." Although not literally incestuous, the closed circuit of sexual tension between John and Lana and Lana's mother positions him as a sort of "bad father" for Lana; indeed, the suggestion that he is older than Lana and her friends also posits him as an authority figure. John acts as a guardian to Lana, and believes he has a duty to protect her; yet this protection is little more than possessive jealousy over her relationship with Brandon. Indeed, taking one step further, John can be seen from an Oedipal perspective to be the father / rival who threatens the boy, in this case Brandon, with castration for falling in love with the mother / daughter.

The fact that Lana clearly desires Brandon only adds to John's jealousy and possessiveness, which in turn escalates the violent and erotically charged exchanges between the two men. Within the complex romantic triangle between Brandon, Lana, and John, it is John who occupies the traditional position of cuckold; even though there is no direct romantic relationship between John and Lana, the insinuation of John's desire for her characterizes him as man who is humiliated by his woman's infidelities. In her paradigm of homosocial desire in erotic love triangles, Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests that between male rivals there is an intense erotic bond. For John and Brandon there is an intense rivalry, but their relationship, like other male homosocial bonds, contains "the fantasy energies of [sexual] compulsion, prohibition, and explosive violence . . . fully structured by the logic of paranoia" (*Between Men* 162). This erotic tension will culminate in John's rape of Brandon, the sexual object who is simultaneously man and woman. These repressed energies are first released when John begins to suspect Brandon is hiding something. As they uncover Brandon's past as "Teena Brandon" through a newspaper article and then discover a pamphlet on sexual identity crisis when snooping through Brandon's bag, John's and Tom's hostility toward Brandon grows into violent hysteria.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Notably, Candace also plays a central role in unmasking Brandon as a woman. Candace makes the discovery of Brandon's tampons and blood-stained jeans, as well as a court summons for "Teena Brandon." She is later pressured by John and Tom to reveal the information that she has uncovered about Brandon's identity. The fact that it is Candace, a woman, who first discovers Brandon's secret reinforces Brandon's constant

Not only are John and Tom repulsed by what they imagine to be Brandon's sexual "deviance" but also, in their homophobic reactions, they are angry and resentful that they have been duped. With regard to John's and Tom's own gender anxiety, this failure to differentiate Brandon's "deviance" from their own "normative" masculinity exposes the instability of and interconnectedness between these. Fuelled by queerphobic rage, John and Tom confront Brandon, calling him a "fucking pervert," saying that he has a "sick psycho brain," that he is brainwashing Lana and infecting her with his "sickness." The language used in this scene highlights the normative gender assumptions against which Brandon's transgender identity is labeled pathological and perverse. Within the constraints of patriarchal binary logic, there is no acceptable deviation between one's anatomy and one's gender identity. Brandon's "deviant" identity sparks violent hostility in John and Tom not only because he does not fit into the binary structure of patriarchal gender norms, but also because, by blurring gender boundaries, Brandon's identity has also put John and Tom's own masculinity under threat. In this regard, Brandon is perceived as a subversive danger that must be destroyed. John and Tom, as well as Lana's mother, are threatened by Brandon's influence, to such an extent that they fear that Lana will somehow be infected. As Lana's mother states to Lana, "We're just tryin' to save you" – with the implication that her daughter needs saving from the dangers posed by Brandon's transgressive sexuality. What is really at stake within this intense confrontation is the "gender trouble" Brandon creates and the subsequent attempt to contain or suppress this perceived threat.

The queerphobia that enables the violent reaction of John and Tom is also evident in the media's problematic labeling of Brandon with a variety of terms: as a "butch" lesbian, cross-dressing lesbian, repressed or homophobic lesbian, tomboy, pre-operative transsexual; as being in a sexual or gender identity crisis or suffering from gender dysphoria.<sup>78</sup> In all these cases, there is a desire to fix Brandon's trans-identity in a

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struggle to transcend and repress his biological female sex. Candace's participation in "outing" Brandon as female also shows women's complicity in gender policing.

<sup>78</sup> See Karina Eileraas's article "The Brandon Teena Story: Rethinking the Body, Gender Identity, and Violence against Women" for a more detailed discussion of how Brandon's identity was conveyed in news reports and media sources.

category that delimits what is otherwise a subversive identity. What Peirce's humanizing approach to this subject matter achieves is an appreciation of Brandon as a human being, regardless of diagnostic and polarizing labels that might be attached to him. At the same time, Peirce disrupts the binary configuration of gender and sexuality by placing under question the so-called "normal" masculinity of men like John and Tom. As Melissa Anderson states in her film review, "What is really in crisis . . . is not Brandon's sexual identity, but the male heterosexual identity inhabited by people like John Lotter and Tom – an identity so fragile that, when threatened by Brandon's 'masquerade' of masculinity – knows no other response than violence" (55). This suggestion that John and Tom are suffering from a "crisis" of their own masculine identity reinforces the reading that what they are really disturbed by is not Brandon's "perversion," but rather the recognition of their own alterity. This crisis –signified in the hysterical reactions of John and Tom – illustrates how patriarchal masculinity is inherently pathological in its enactment of violence as a "normal" or "natural" expression of manhood. John and Tom will use their bodies as weapons against Brandon: beating and raping him.

John and Tom take up the position of guardians of patriarchal gender norms when they forcibly restrain Brandon in the bathroom and examine his genitals. In what Halberstam calls a "quasi-medical scrutiny of Brandon's body," John and Tom roughly examine Brandon's anatomy and subject him to "a violent mode of looking" that she identifies with "castration" and "the male gaze" (295). Within this violent act of looking, John and Tom are able to reinforce their binary logic by confirming Brandon's biological sex as female. In this way, they not only humiliate Brandon by stripping him of his masculinity, but also attempt to reify Brandon's gender within essentialist terms. The scene culminates with John and Tom forcing Lana also to look at Brandon's genitals, diagnosing that he is female. Yet instead of confirming this diagnosis, Lana yells at them "to leave *him* alone!" (italics added). In her use of the pronoun "him" to refer to Brandon, Lana resists John and Tom's oppressive sexual essentialism. In this way, Lana's and Brandon's mutual love and respect for each other transcend the phobia of John and Tom.

During his scrutiny under the violating gaze of John and Tom, Brandon dissociates from his body. Peirce represents this splitting by showing a double image: one

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of Brandon, naked and tortured, and one of Brandon, fully clothed and standing in the crowd, looking on at his suffering Other. In her reading of this scene, Halberstam identifies the splitting of Brandon as a division between “the castrated and the transgender Brandons” (296), where the term “castrated” refers to Brandon’s powerlessness in this abject state. The relevance of this splitting is that it is not just applicable to the transgender individual who feels divided between their biological sex and gender identity as well as traumatized by violence; doubling or splitting is also an apt metaphor for the more general experience of masculinity under patriarchy. The abjection of the castrated body fortifies the idealized, phallic, complete man. Indeed, hegemonic masculinity relies on the suppression of masculine lack, where this denial occurs on both personal and collective levels of misrecognition (Silverman 24). Peirce illustrates this repudiation of masculine lack through John’s and Tom’s scapegoating of Brandon, using him as a surrogate for their own fragility, weakness, and lack. The film goes so far as to cast Brandon as a Christ figure, a point made clear in the scene where he is scrutinized and assaulted. As Halberstam indicates, this scene bears “resemblance to a crucifixion tableau” (295): Brandon’s bruised and beaten body is propped up by John and Tom while they expose his body to Lana and the others. Brandon as both martyr and scapegoat embodies an abject masculinity aligned with Christ’s in his crucifixion, as Brandon suffers ostracism, objectification, and inhuman cruelty, and ultimately is sacrificed in preservation of the social order.

John’s and Tom’s violent inscription of their own lack onto Brandon’s body does not end with the public disclosure of his genitals as biologically female, but goes on to culminate in the act of rape. As certain critics have suggested, Brandon’s violation through visual scrutiny and his rape are symbolic forms of castration, whereby Brandon is violently severed from his own masculinity. Swan writes, “We may see this rape as the moment in which John and Tom castrate Brandon, thereby restoring his vagina as a female orifice” (50). Swan’s reading of the rape confirms the view that John and Tom see themselves as guarding or protecting dominant gender norms, where “the rape repositions everyone according to their ‘god-given’ gender” (50). The rape not only affirms Brandon as a woman, but also enables John and Tom to “[reaffirm] themselves as men” (50). Melissa Rigney also draws upon the film’s representation of “symbolic castration” (8) in

stating that John's and Tom's rape of Brandon is an attempt to "normaliz[e] Brandon's body and . . . realign categories of sex and gender" (9). John and Tom thereby eliminate "the threat to [their] masculinity. . . . Brandon is no longer the 'better boyfriend' or the better man, but is instead a victim" (Rigney 9). In this sense, the act of rape is a means of containing that which poses a threat to the established order. By presenting rape as a symbolic castration used to reaffirm the normative alignment of sex and gender, Peirce presents John's and Tom's rape of Brandon as an act of extreme conformity to the dominant patriarchal order, wherein women and men are raped as a means of rendering them powerless.

However, rather than seeing John and Tom as ruthless monsters, Peirce represents their violence as exemplary of hypermasculine conformity. The endorsement of homophobia, queerphobia and misogyny within the dominant social order is exposed as general once Brandon reports his rape to police authorities; instead of defending Brandon's rights, the police officer's interrogation is yet another form of rape or castration. The police officer bullies Brandon, subjecting him to humiliating questions and further degradation. Sheriff Laux, who interviews Brandon following his rape, also dehumanizes Brandon in his mistreatment of the case. Specifically, Laux refers to Brandon as "it" (D'Erasmio 66) and does not protect him from John and Tom. As an example of queerphobia, Laux's statement reveals the failure of the law authorities to protect Brandon's rights owing to their inexcusable intolerance of Brandon as a transgender individual. Laux's questioning of Brandon also has the effect of re-traumatizing him. Indeed, in many ways Laux's questioning seems to support John's suggestion that Brandon "brought this on [him]self," that everything that happened to Brandon was somehow his fault. Indeed, with the exception of Lana, everyone accuses Brandon of lying to them, believing that his lies must be punished. The association of lying or deception with Brandon's performance reinforces the fear and anxiety surrounding non-normative gender and sexuality. In this regard, Peirce's representation of queerphobia illustrates how it is one, if not *the*, central organizing principle of contemporary hegemonic masculinity. John's and Tom's queerphobic response to Brandon, which leads not only to rape but also to Brandon's murder, cannot be viewed outside of the normative construction of masculinity. Rather, the violence committed by

John and Tom needs to be understood as part of a continuum of intolerance that is entrenched within the patriarchal “machine” (Cixous “Sorties” 71).

Peirce’s depiction of Brandon unsettles the opposition between what is perceived as dominant and normative sex and gender and what is perceived as marginal and deviant. Brandon’s ability to live and dream beyond the constraints of his society offers a potentially revolutionary space, where normative sexual and gender categories are liberated from their “binary prison” (Barthes qtd. by Sedgwick *Epistemology* 10). Even though Peirce’s film depicts Brandon’s horrific death, it is the courage and heroism of Brandon’s spirit that stand out as the central message of the film. The final scene shows Lana driving out of Falls City, while Brandon’s voice recites the letter he had written to her. In the letter, Brandon expresses his enduring love and his unwavering belief that one day soon they will be reunited. Brandon’s conviction that a future full of love, happiness and personal fulfillment is attainable inspires Lana to finally escape her dead-end life in Falls City.

Although Peirce’s film can be seen as a liberatory narrative that undermines the binary configuration of sex and gender (B. Cooper), there are also critics who perceive limitations in Peirce’s ability to promote consistently this “trans-” quality or “queerness” of Brandon’s identity. Specifically, Peirce’s film is criticized for prioritizing the love story between Lana and Brandon at the expense of any real engagement with Brandon’s transsexual masculinity. Halberstam, Henderson, Patricia White, and John Phillips have all commented on the film’s limitations in depicting Brandon’s transsexuality.<sup>79</sup> At the core of this criticism is the inability of mainstream cultural products to encompass

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<sup>79</sup> Phillips argues that Peirce’s rendering of romance requires the “‘lesbianisation’ of Brandon and Lana in the final love-making scene” following Brandon’s rape (146). Specifically, he argues that this love scene differs from the previous lovemaking between Lana and Brandon, in the fact that Brandon is no longer taking a masculine role (or using a phallic substitute in the sex act). Henderson also criticizes Peirce’s prioritizing of romance as diminishing Brandon’s masculinity in recuperation of his previous identity as Teena, a so-called “girly-girl” not unlike Lana. Halberstam’s criticism of the final love scene between Brandon and Lana also argues that Peirce’s rendition of Brandon in this scene “pull[s] back from its previous commitment to his masculinity” in that it “ties Brandon’s humanity to a particular form of naked embodiment that eventually requires him to be a woman” (297-98).

“queerness” adequately, without reverting to more conventional binary identifications of sexuality and gender or to more conventional generic and gendered plots or endings. The challenge posed by Brandon’s queerness, on and off the screen, is to preserve the unfixed mutability of gender and sexuality, rather than constrain identity within rigid binaries and narratives.

The lasting impact of Brandon’s story not only comes from the message that Peirce’s film successfully highlights in the heartfelt empathy she creates through the audience’s identification with Brandon. This impact also comes from the film’s depiction of the subversiveness of transgender in its ability to disrupt and challenge patriarchy. In this regard, Brandon’s identity reveals how John’s and Tom’s own masculinities are vulnerable, pathological and destructive. Beneath the pathos that we feel for Brandon and Lana – and to a lesser extent, John and Tom – as victims of a system that perpetuates a cycle of violence and violation, there is also a challenge to stop this cycle by changing or dismantling the binaries of gender and sexuality. In this regard, Brandon’s queer identity is presented as a form of personhood that needs to be not only tolerated but celebrated. As Peirce states, “I like to think that Brandon embodies something that we’re moving toward and that we will continue learning to understand, enjoy, and represent our genders and our desires, individually and collectively, in our art and in our lives” (46). The evolution of genders and desires that Peirce alludes to depends on our ability as a culture to accept and strive for trans-identity or hybridity as a goal, rather than abject it. In this effort toward progress and cultural evolution, artistic expressions of all types are leading the charge. As I will argue in the conclusion that follows, queer identities, both in art and in life, are leading a progressive, cultural shift away from the patriarchal binary system towards a potentially revolutionary postgenderism.

As this section illustrates, both Brandon and Robert Ross in *The Wars* defy the constraints of the patriarchal binary system by “queering” the boundaries of masculinity. While both Robert and Brandon, at times, desire to conform to the hegemonic model of masculinity, they also suffer inhumane cruelty at the hands of the patriarchal system. Under the constraints of a toxic patriarchal culture, individuals like Brandon and Robert do not have the freedom to live their lives without the constant threat and reality of violence. Indeed, narratives like Findley’s *The Wars* and Peirce’s *Boys Don’t Cry* provide

a glimpse into the real conditions facing LGBT individuals who are forced to endure cruelty and abuse of their rights under a patriarchal system that considers them to be less-than-human.

## Conclusion

### **Literary Awakenings: The Potential Impact of Trauma Narratives in Transforming Patriarchal Culture**

As Euripides knew, terror has this good thing about it: it makes us sit up and take notice. Tragic dramas . . . can awaken the sleepers by reminding them of human realities they are neglecting in their daily political lives . . . [and] possibly awaken a larger sense of the humanity of suffering.

(Martha Nussbaum, "Compassion and Terror" 26)

One of the central questions posed in this study is how we justify the expression of violent masculinity as "normal" or "natural" when it is directly responsible for mass-scale sexual violence against and the persecution of female and feminized Others. This includes not only the sexual violence experienced by girls and women every day around the world, but also the persistent, threatening conditions to which marginalized and minority populations are exposed under patriarchal culture. Hegemonic masculinity remains caught or stuck in a destructive pattern of fear, anxiety, and violent repudiation of femininity that contributes directly to the high incidence of sexual violence enacted by male perpetrators. As long as patriarchal masculinity remains the status quo, some boys and men will continue to perform their gender through predation, intimidation, and aggression; they will continue to target and punish those who are different from the norm, projecting their fears of inadequacy onto those who are vulnerable and marginalized; they will continue to repress their emotions, and use their bodies as weapons or instruments of patriarchal power. In short, as long as masculinity is socially constructed around the qualities of mastery and dominance, there will be some men who commit violence in order to be "real men."

Rather than accepting violence as normal and natural by justifying its perpetrators as "boys being boys," there is an urgent need to challenge the ways in which patriarchal culture is both complacent about and complicit in the securing of masculine dominance by violence. As identified in this study, violent masculinity should be viewed as

symptomatic of a larger problem: the toxic influence of patriarchal culture. To suggest that masculinity, as it is currently constrained by patriarchal norms, remains caught in a pathological state of gender dis-ease, is also to imply that the violence accepted as natural and normal is, in fact, an ideological construct that serves the purpose of maintaining inequalities of power. The systematic use of sexual violence within patriarchy needs to be critiqued in its influence over gender norms, as well as challenged through social action. As Laura S. Brown argues, hierarchies of power are reaffirmed through violence, not only warfare but also the everyday “insidious traumata” (122) that affect the lives of already marginalized people. As Brown suggests, the dominant culture readily accepts that certain people are “less than human, less than deserving of fair treatment” (124). As long as the dominant culture is patriarchal, there will always be those who are excluded from basic rights over their own body that are violated every time an act of sexual violence is committed.

As Nussbaum identifies in the epigraph to this conclusion, the narrative imagination holds the potential to awaken those who are ideologically complacent or ignorant of the realities of suffering experienced daily in a violent patriarchal culture. As noted in trauma theory, narratives in the form of autobiographical accounts and survivor testimonies are necessary to recovery. Within trauma theory, there is an emphasis on the process of narration or witnessing as essential to recovery. Narratives integrate the fragments of traumatic flashbacks, create a sense of order and reality to the past, inspire feelings of mastery and catharsis in the victim / author, as well as build a supportive community of empathetic listeners. According to Tal, by narrating trauma the victim/survivor is able to turn “[a traumatic event] from a frightening and uncontrollable event into a contained and predictable narrative” (6). By integrating the fragments of memory into a cohesive narrative, the victim / survivor can then share this story and be affirmed by a receptive audience, often a therapist (124). Survivor testimonies are “the *beginning* of a long process of struggle towards change” (160). While trauma narratives are not going to change patriarchal culture by themselves, they do represent a starting point for social change by promoting connections of empathy and identification. Narratives of traumatic violation can be viewed as playing a critical role in the transformation of self and culture. It is one thing to know that persons around the world

have been victims of battery, assault, incest, rape and murder based on their gender and sexual orientation, but it is another thing to feel their pain and horror. Nussbaum discusses the extent to which narrative can be a means to provoke and educate its audience in the commonality of “human weakness and vulnerability” (24). To recognize commonality is to cross the barriers of patriarchal culture, in particular gender disparities: as Nussbaum acknowledges in relation to Euripides’s play *The Trojan Women*, “feeling fear and grief . . . [the audience] demonstrate[s] the ability of compassion to cross lines of time, place, and nation – and also, in the case of many audience members, the line of sex, perhaps more difficult yet to cross” (11). It is this difficult but necessary crossing of the “line of sex” that is premised as the central conflict or challenge in this study. This crossing of patriarchal binary divisions of masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality, is central to the social impact of the narratives of contemporary artists and filmmakers that I have examined in this study.

One means of provoking change is to defamiliarize the status quo. Contemporary Gothic authors accomplish this by rendering what is “normal” or “natural” as sick and disturbed. By placing hegemonic masculinity under question in depictions of male violators, these authors show that when gender norms are exaggerated or taken to the extreme, sadistic violence and monstrous crimes of inhumanity can result. To read the Gothic literature of McEwan, Gaiman and Süskind is to experience horror, disgust, and fear; these authors produce a traumatic experience for their readers as a means to shock and disturb. Following Aristotle in the *Poetics*, the reader is made to feel not only terror, pity, and compassion for the victims of sexual violence, but also his or her own vulnerability; in other words, trauma is induced in the reader. The process of reading contemporary Gothic narratives necessitates a crossing of the thresholds of patriarchal binaries. By disrupting the status quo and challenging complacency through depictions of traumatizing violence, these authors have created narratives that can awaken their readers to recognize the real-life horrors of hegemonic masculinity.

I have also argued that narrative can be a powerful counter-discourse to patriarchal constructions; it brings attention to the often repressed and dissident voices of male victims who are marginalized and silenced under patriarchal culture. The reception of Peirce’s film *Boys Don’t Cry* is evidence of how a fictional portrayal of a real-life



event can effectively alter the perceptions of the audience, where the struggles of being transgender all of a sudden become knowable. Although not all viewers would experience this insight, the broad audience of Peirce's film is in a position to empathize and understand Brandon's dilemma because it involves a common struggle to be loved, accepted, and free to pursue one's dreams without having to face social prejudices or violent, punitive consequences for being perceived as different. The audience is invited to identify with Brandon as a person, a human, rather than seeing him as John and Tom see him – as sick or perverted, a freak. In this way, Peirce's storytelling challenges patriarchal categories by allowing a conventionally marginalized figure to become the tragic hero, the subject with whom the audience empathizes.

Findley's *The Wars* also works on this level of empathy and identification. The reader can identify with Robert Ross as he faces the conflict between his desires and the pressures of conforming to the patriarchal norm of masculinity. Findley's portrayal of the patriarchal-military system exposes how it suppresses and subdues dissident subjectivities like Robert Ross's, whose compassion and sensitivity mark him as an outsider. Through the process of storytelling, the dissident voice of Robert Ross need no longer be suppressed, but rather recognized as heroic in his resistance to patriarchy and memorialized through literary representation. Findley's literary rendition of war also enables the reader to gain insight into the personal side of mass traumas, as well as into the connection between sexual violence and military violence. Indeed, as in Findley's novel, in both Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* personal and mass traumas are aligned through narratives in which the personal and public, intimate and collective, intersect in ways that provide the reader with new insight into gendered experiences of war and genocide. Both of the male protagonists in Coetzee's and Lee's narratives follow the pattern of transformation from complicity to empathy; the protagonists are no longer blind to the suffering of others, as each man becomes aware of the brutal consequences of his own actions as a violator. In turn, each man also learns to empathize and identify with the female or feminized Other, a process that is, according to Nussbaum, an essential movement towards social change.

By presenting men or masculine subjects who defy patriarchal constraints, who change and grow through empathetic identification with Others, who reveal the

vulnerabilities and anxieties beneath the façade, and who expose patriarchal power as a destructive, sadistic force, these contemporary authors and filmmakers are creating a counter-discourse to the gendered discourse of dominant culture. The texts included within this study represent traumatic experiences of sexual violence in order to awaken or disturb the reader from a state of complacency. The process of empathetic identification that is effected by narrative can also be seen as planting the seed of social action. As Nussbaum describes, the audience “learn[s] that people different in sex, race, age, and nation experience suffering in a way that is like our way, and that suffering is as crippling for them as it would be for us” (Nussbaum 26). This insight into commonality carries the potential for social change – at the very least, inspiring a more compassionate approach to the suffering of Others because one recognizes that the Other *is* also oneself.

Along with the pedagogical mission of trauma narratives in exposing the real-life atrocities of misogynistic violence and queer / homophobia, they are equally important in imagining masculinity in ways that defy or challenge its hegemonic forms. By representing the diversity of masculinities, contemporary authors and filmmakers can partake in a decentering of hegemonic gender identity. Narratives of non-hegemonic masculinities, such as those found in a film like Peirce’s *Boys Don’t Cry* or a fictional narrative like Findley’s *The Wars*, are not solely tragic narratives of victimization under patriarchal constraints, but also inspirational narratives of courage and defiance. At the level of the imagination, both Peirce’s film and Findley’s novel offer ways to challenge and move beyond the existing sex and gender roles, inadequate and narrowly constrained. Brandon and Robert are able to think, dream, and act in ways that run counter to the norm; in this way, these characters model a progressive gender politics that challenges the dominant culture by representing a plural and inclusive approach to expressions of sex and gender. Indeed, contemporary authors, filmmakers and technologies such as those discussed here are on the cutting edge of a shift in gender politics,<sup>80</sup> where gender-

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<sup>80</sup> For example, in the works of writers like Doug Rice and Kathy Acker, non-normative subjectivities are explored and celebrated, and patriarchal power structures are exposed as a source of violence, misogyny, and hate. Rice’s texts *Skin Prayer*, *Mugwump*, and *A Good Cunt-boy is Hard to Find* demonstrate how experimental styles of postmodernism enable sex/gender binaries to dissolve or explode under the pluralities of desire and identification. Kathy Acker’s controversial works are also known for their experimental

bending, gender-blending, and non-hegemonic sexualities are being represented more and more as a desirable alternative to normative sex / gender roles.

It is with optimism and hope that I conclude this discussion of literary representations of gender violence by expressing my belief in the revolutionary potential of narrative as a counter-discourse to the rigidly binary, divisive, and destructive patriarchal discourse of sex and gender. Narrative can be a means to model non-hegemonic gender in ways that promote and inspire empathy and social action. The potential to transform and liberate sex and gender from patriarchal constraints is directly tied to our ability to imagine and represent a future where violence is no longer acceptable or promoted as the “normal” or “natural” condition of masculinity. Indeed, it is my belief that both men and women will gain from the liberation of the sex / gender system into plurality through the proliferation of desire and identifications, a liberation possible once patriarchal ideologies are shattered and collective social action is mobilized. Yet positive transformation in this direction can occur only when the boundaries of binary logic are crossed – when the divisions between self and Other are no longer barriers, but connections.

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subversion of dominant culture. Cyberculture, as well, can also be seen as a potential location of sex/gender plurality, where there are limitless possibilities of remapping identities without the threat of violence. The growing popularity of computer-generated gaming also holds the potential for individuals to explore a variety of gender identities and sexualities through cyber-simulations.

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